

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Have you ever heard the Mass called a spectacle? And by the way, "the term "Mass" is derived from the Late Latin word *missa*. "In antiquity, *missa* simply meant 'dismissal'. In Christian usage, however, it gradually took on a deeper meaning. The word 'dismissal' has come to imply a 'mission'. The word is meant to succinctly express the missionary nature of the Church"<sup>1</sup> Now the reason we Lutherans don't refer to our worship as the Mass even though we essentially do a mass, is because the word Mass is associated with being Catholic. Lutherans, especially American Lutherans, do not like associating our traditions with the Roman church when in actuality, these are really Christians symbols and words.

But it is not without good reasons that Lutherans tend to distant ourselves from our Roman brothers and sisters. This is how Tim Wengert describes the Eucharist of the 1500's:

It was a feast for the eyes and a ceremony for the dead. The words of institution were whispered sotto voce by a richly attired, distant priests. The worshipers were often fenced off from the officiant by means of ornately carved wood screens. The buildings not only contained imposing tabernacles for the consecrated host but were themselves often designed as ostentatious markers for the miracle of God's coming to earth in the "un-bloody sacrifice" of the mass. Chronicles even recorded Sunday-morning stampedes from one church to another, as the faithful rushed to catch a glimpse of the central act of the mass, the elevation, when the priests offering to God was consummated. And every day, at the countless altars dotting the interior of many churches, thousands upon thousands of masses were recited privately for dead souls languishing in purgatory.<sup>2</sup> A lot has changed since the 1500's. Liturgical reform has happened in both the Lutheran church and the Roman church as well. To say their still remains an issue between Lutherans and Catholics as to how to conduct worship is really a mute point these days. Are we still different? Yes, but do we have more in common now than we ever have had before? Yes.

So with that said, I don't really plan on talking this morning/evening about the Liturgical differences of our two churches nor discuss where we differ in our view of the Eucharist. Quiet frankly, we do not differ in worship much at all. We, Lutherans that is, believe that Christ is present in the bread and wine and you won't find a Catholic who would argue with that. So instead, let's talk about why we believe and what we believe about this blessed sacrament.

Let's start with that first question:

### **What is the Sacrament of the Altar?**

*It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and to drink.*

So, we should start out by talking about why Luther is saying what he is saying. At the time Luther was writing his catechism, there were the two different groups challenging Luther's eucharistic theology: Ulrich Zwingli and the Romans.

Zwingli would go on to lead the Ana-Baptist movement. "Zwingli argued that the Mass pulled people away from the spirit into the world of flesh and matter. The Supper was supposed to be a sign of the communicant's faith and a mnemonic device for remembering Christ's death, not a means of grace or the locus of Christ's presence on earth."<sup>3</sup> Zwingli would argue that Christ has ascended into heaven and therefore was no longer present on earth; having Christ present in this meal would negate the Ascension.

Zwingli also quoted John 6:63 that said "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." Zwingli would that since Jesus says, "the flesh is useless," Jesus would not give us a meal where we eat his flesh but rather is a memorial to his work on earth. So by Luther unequivocally saying "It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and

wine” was really Luther stating his belief on what happens in the bread and wine. Very simple but very important. This is what it means when we say we believe in the Real Presence.

And the last part of this explanation (instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and to drink) was meant for the Catholics who would rather parade the Host around but never allow the people to eat it or never want to eat it. For Luther, the eucharist was not meant to be worship but to be eaten. But let me be clear, in the eucharist when we get to the end of the words of institution and I elevate the paten and the chalice - it is not so much a form of worship but an opportunity for everyone to see what has taken place. That is, Christ coming into our midst in the bread and in the wine. It is very appropriate to bow one’s head and give thanks to God but we shouldn’t then just put the sacrament away - we all got to eat.

Okay, let’s skip to the next question:

### **What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?**

*The words “given for you” and “shed for you for the forgiveness of sin” show us that forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation.*

When you read this question, I want you to think of Martin Luther as Pastor Luther. This answer is more than just memorizing key facts. The eucharist is about one’s faith. The eucharist really does matter and is important. For it offers the believer forgiveness of sin, life and salvation. Where baptism offers forgiveness of THE sin; original sin. Communion offers forgiveness of sin that we face daily. Think of the the daily sin like the hunger. Confession forgives you but it doesn't fill the void that sin leaves. Communion fills the hunger that sin has created in our bodies and gives the believer the faith to believe that God has forgiven of all my sins.

It is the same way of saying, “You gotta eat every day” but you don’t need to be born every day. Baptism is a one time thing because you only need to be born once. Communion is needed daily even to give the believer the faith

- to believe in God,
- the strength to do the work of gospel
- faith to believe that God can forgive
  - my sin,
  - grant me life,
  - and bring me safely to his arms when my journey ends on this earth.

As Luther once said, “For times like these, when our heart feels too sorely pressed, the comfort of the Lord’s supper is given to bring us new strength and refreshment.”

See, my brothers and sisters, this blessed sacrament is more than just a simple meal. When we might say, “This world needs more Jesus” the Holy Spirit is over here jumping up and down and saying, “Here you go. Here’s how you get more Jesus.” I mean, it really is that simple. I see all these Facebook posts and articles written by pastors and theologians of how to fix the church’s problem. You know, none of them talk about the Eucharist. None of them talk about sacraments. They say we need to be better at making disciples. Well, what does baptism do but make disciples. What does communion do but give the disciples the nourishment needed to strengthen their faith; it gives the believer Jesus.

You know, maybe, at the end of the day, we should simply do what Jesus says to do. Instead of trying to be the latest, hippest church, we be the church that brings Jesus to the people and we do so in a way that he has commanded us to do. You want to increase the faith of fellow Christians? Give them something to eat. Give them this meal. Take and eat of this bread and wine, my brothers and sisters. For it is in this meal, that all believers are ushered into the Holy Spirit’s workshop and we encounter Jesus working for us, not against us and we see God’s glory in these simple elements of bread and wine because God promised to be there and God never breaks a promise.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass\\_\(liturgy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass_(liturgy)) taken on April 4, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 131-132.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) page 132.