

LORD'S SUPPER V. THE MASS
(SUNDAY, APRIL 3, 2011)

SCRIPTURE READING: 10 COMMANDMENTS; MATTHEW 26:26-30

INTRODUCTION

Once a month in our current practice we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Every celebration is almost the same. I share a few opening words of instruction and warning often reading from 1 Corinthians 11. We pause for a time of prayer. The bread is distributed. I read from 1 Cor. 11. We eat the bread. Then we pause for another time of prayer. The wine is distributed. I read again from 1 Cor. 11. We drink the wine. I read for the final time from 1 Cor. 11. The entire communion service is about 10 minutes or so in length, not that I keep close track of time.

I believe we know that this is an important thing that we do, but I think it is likely that we don't always give sufficient thought to what we do.

The significance is not the length. The significance is not the amount of bread or wine that is part of the meal. There are parts of our service that probably could be improved. But even in our simplicity there is thankfully much more that takes place than we realize.

This simple meal given to us by our Lord and Savior is a meal that we eat together and with Jesus Christ. This is why the meal we eat is called Communion. It is a meal that both pictures our communion with God and is part of our communion with God.

I would like us to give attention to the Lord's Supper by considering Q/A 80 from the Heidelberg Catechism.

Question 80. How does the Lord's Supper differ from the Roman Catholic Mass?

Answer. The Lord's Supper declares to us that our sins have been completely forgiven through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ which He Himself finished on the cross once for all.¹ It also declares to us that the Holy Spirit grafts us into Christ,² who with His very body is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father³ where He wants us to worship Him.⁴ But the Mass teaches that the living and the dead do not have their sins forgiven through the suffering of Christ unless Christ is still offered for them daily by the priests. It also teaches that Christ is bodily present in the form of bread and wine where Christ is therefore to be worshiped. Thus the Mass is basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ and a condemnable idolatry.⁵

We will consider this answer from the Heidelberg Catechism in two parts. First, we will give attention to the negative portion of this answer dealing with the Roman Mass. Second, we will then give attention to three wonderful realities which we celebrate in the Lord's Supper.

1. NEGATIVES OF THE MASS

At our Reformation Day celebration in 2010, I spoke briefly about Zacharias Ursinus, the primary author of the Heidelberg Catechism. Ursinus was asked by Frederick III, Elector Palatine, to develop a catechism that would encourage the understanding of the Reformed Faith. Because of debates with both Lutherans and Roman Catholics, special attention was given to the Lord's Supper in the Heidelberg Catechism. In 1563, the first edition of the Catechism was printed. The second edition of the Catechism included what is perhaps the most famous question and answer – question and answer number 80. The third edition of the Catechism added the words, **the mass is an accursed idolatry** or condemnable idolatry as some modern versions now read.

These strong words likely have offended many. They are not considered to be very nice. But the main question is not whether they are nice but whether they are true.

The word **Mass** comes from the Latin verb *missa*, which means **to dismiss**. The last part of a service is the dismissal or departure of the people. The name for the last part of this service came to be used for the entire service.¹

It is probably quite common for people to think that the Roman Catholic Mass is simply the Catholic way for celebrating communion. But such is not the case, a point that both Catholics and Protestants must admit.

The Mass according to Roman Catholic doctrine is a **sacrifice**, not simply in the sense of a sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving, or worship. No, the Mass is said to be a **bloodless sacrifice**, which is offered for both the living and the dead, in order to satisfy the justice of God. The Council of Trent declared, “The sacrifice [in the Mass] is identical with the sacrifice of the Cross, inasmuch as Jesus Christ is a priest and victim both. The only difference lies in the manner of offering, which is bloody upon the cross and bloodless on our altars.”²

The Council of Trent also declared, “If any one saith, that the Mass is only a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. . . but not a propitiatory sacrifice; or, that it profits only the recipient, and that it ought not to be offered for the living and the dead for sins, punishments, satisfactions, and other necessities; let him be anathema.”³

The sacrifice of the mass supposedly takes place in the actions of the priest and in his consecration of the bread and wine as being the very body and blood of Jesus Christ. The bread and wine are not offered in sacrifice but supposedly the very body and blood of Jesus Christ are offered in sacrifice. The priest holds up the wafers of bread in a golden dish and the wine in a golden cup as part of the act of sacrifice.⁴ Then as a sacrament the

¹ Pohle, Joseph. "Sacrifice of the Mass." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 10. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 2 Apr. 2011 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10006a.htm>>.

² Cited by Lorraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, 169.

³ Pohle, Joseph. "Sacrifice of the Mass." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 10. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 2 Apr. 2011 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10006a.htm>>.

⁴ Boettner, 170.

body and sometimes the blood of Jesus Christ is given to those who have come to witness the spectacle of this sacrifice.

The Heidelberg Catechism highlights two main errors concerning the Roman Mass.

- 1) The Mass is essential to forgiveness of sins of the living and dead
- 2) Christ is bodily present in the bread and wine; the elements are therefore to be worshipped/adored.

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, the sacrifice of the Mass, has the double function of obliterating actual sins (especially mortal sins), and also of taking away for those in a state of grace, temporal punishments.⁵

Also according to the Catholic Encyclopedia there are three special fruits of the Mass. There is the general fruit which benefits all those present, the whole Church, the pope, the diocesan bishop, the faithful living and dead, and all mankind including the excommunicated, heretics, and infidels. There is a second fruit given to those who properly come to the sacrifice of the Mass. The third fruit, the special fruit of the Mass, is that fruit applied to particular living or deceased persons according to the intention of the celebrant **or the donor of a stipend**. This application rests exclusively in the hands of the priest.⁶

Though the Roman Catholic Church of course teaches that forgiveness comes through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, the sacrifice of the Mass is still needed and continues to offer forgiveness. In fact according to Catholic teaching it is a great sin, a mortal sin, for the practicing Catholic to ever miss a weekly Mass unless one was physically not able to attend. The Mass is essential for the forgiveness of sins. It is not something merely optional or a blessing. Salvation depends on it. Souls will remain in purgatory longer unless Masses are continually given for their purification.

The second great error and horror discussed in the Heidelberg Catechism is the doctrine of transubstantiation. Through a double-miracle, the bread and wine continue to look like bread and wine, but the substance of the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ.

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia the term transubstantiation was first used about the year 1079. It became part of official Catholic doctrine at the Council of Lateran in 1215.

According to Catholic teaching and practice, when the priest declares of the bread, "This is my body," the miracle of transubstantiation takes place. The appearance of bread and wine remain, but at the words of consecration, the bread and wine miraculously change

⁵ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. Sacrifice of the Mass

⁶ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. Sacrifice of the Mass

substance and become the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. The bread and wine at this point are called the host.

Because of this false doctrine, another dangerous practice follows, which is the actual adoration or worship of the bread and wine, the host.

Quoting again from the Catholic Encyclopedia, “Now, identically the same Lord Christ is truly present in the Eucharist as is present in heaven; consequently He is to be adored in the Blessed Sacrament, and just so long as He remains present under the appearances of bread and wine, namely, from the moment of Transubstantiation to the moment in which the species are decomposed.”⁷

Throughout the world various societies and organizations have been formed which seek to give practically uninterrupted worship of the Blessed Sacrament.⁸ Some members of the Society of the Most Blessed Sacrament founded in 1857 are dedicated to exclusively spend their time in perpetual adoration of the host – the supposed body and blood of Christ. I don’t know the extent of such superstitious worship today, though it would not be surprising to see it still in existence.

There is much more that could be studied about the sad history of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice but it is not an exaggeration to say that the “Mass is a denial of the sacrifice and suffering of Christ; it is a condemnable idolatry.”

2. THREE GREAT REALITIES CELEBRATED IN THE LORD’S SUPPER

I noted recently an article written by a young woman who somehow claims to be a follower of Christ though she has rejected orthodox belief. She states that it is more important to live the reality of the Lord’s Supper than it is to actually celebrate the meal of the Lord’s Supper. This is similar to the attitude of people who say that they better worship God by talking a walk in the woods than in gathering with other Christians according to the command of God. When we celebrate our monthly communion service it is sadly the case that it can be easy to forget the significance of what we together proclaimed in our celebration. So it is good that we frequently give attention to the blessings and realities proclaimed in the Lord’s Supper.

The Heidelberg Catechism has 8 questions and answers dealing with the Lord’s Supper. In question and answer number 80, the Heidelberg Catechism focuses on three of the great realities that we celebrate in the Lord’s Supper.

- 1) Forgiveness of sins through the one sacrifice of Christ
- 2) Our union with Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit

⁷ Pohle, Joseph. "The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 5. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909. 2 Apr. 2011 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05573a.htm>>.

⁸ McMahan, Joseph. "Perpetual Adoration." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 1. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907. 2 Apr. 2011 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01152a.htm>>.

3) Worship of Christ who is physically present now in heaven at the right hand of the Father

Are your sins forgiven because you eat and drink the meal of the Lord's Supper? **Not at all.** But through eating and drinking you are given physical signs to help you appreciate the one-time sacrifice of Christ which has secured your forgiveness.

Four times in the book of Hebrews a very important adverb is used, which is translated once for all, that is once for all time, **never to be repeated.**⁹

Heb. 7:27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all (ἐφάπαξ), when He offered up Himself.

Heb. 9:12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all (ἐφάπαξ), having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:28 so Christ was offered once (ἅπαξ) to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

Heb. 10:10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all* (ἐφάπαξ).

What a precious truth is found in the understanding of this great truth. Here is a sure foundation for hope and comfort. How foolish is it to think that something else is needed in order for God to forgive the sins of His people. How foolish it is for you to think that you must do some work in order to achieve God's favor. The work of Christ has been done. It is finished was His great cry. No more sacrifices are needed. Christ no longer suffers in anyway to pay for the sins of His people.

Now do we still confess our sins to God? Yes, Scripture calls you to still confess your sins to God. Some would suggest that since Christ has paid the one-time sacrifice for our sins that there is no longer any need for confession. But this idea is to confuse the one-time sacrifice of Christ and the continual need for Christians to humble themselves before God and recognize their sin. When you confess your sin your assurance that your sins are truly forgiven is not based on your prayer but rather the sacrifice of Christ. Confession does not secure your forgiveness with God, but confessing your sins is a duty that God still gives to you.

In a similar way, each time that you hold in your hands the bread and the wine of communion, you are given encouragement to look with total trust and assurance to the

⁹ ἐφάπαξ - 2. taking place once and to the exclusion of any further occurrence, *once for all, once and never again.* BDAG, s.v. "ἐφάπαξ," 417.

sacrifice of Christ. In the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, “As surely as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup given to me, so surely His body was offered and broken for me and His blood poured out for me on the cross.”

One of the constant rebukes of the Roman Catholic Church to the teaching of the Reformation was that it would encourage people to abuse God’s grace by simply claiming, all my sins are forgiven. But those who truly have tasted the grace of God know that forgiveness of sins is not simply the result of God ignoring your sin. Forgiveness is not God saying to you, “Oh, don’t worry about it. Your sin is no big deal to me.” **No, forgiveness is the result of Jesus Christ bearing the punishment that you deserve for eternity.** And so as you hold in your hand the bread and the cup, consider the justice and wrath of God which our Lord and Savior endured on the cross. This is why we don’t abuse grace, because we appreciate, though not fully, the great price that was paid.

Second, the communion meal is given to encourage you to realize your union with Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Last year we looked at John 6:53-58 where Jesus spoke of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Jesus spoke these words before the institution of the Lord’s Supper. He was not speaking directly of the communion meal nor was in any way speaking about literally eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

Eating His flesh and drinking His blood – very strong language – refers to two things. First, it means to trust in Jesus Christ for salvation, which He accomplished in His sacrificial death - His flesh ripped, beaten, and pierced; His blood shed to pay for your sins, to take the wrath which you deserve from a holy and righteous God. Second, the strong words Jesus used speak of our union and communion with Him. Jesus stated in John 6:56. “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”

Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23 wrote, “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: **that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread.**” There is no way to try to relive the drama of that evening or of the events that followed. I don’t think the goal is to duplicate the same emotional experience of Jesus’ disciples who ate that last meal with Him before His great suffering. But what a privilege is given to us in our continued celebration of the meal which Jesus instituted. For we eat this meal with Jesus Christ. He is present with us, not physically of course. But through the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ is present with us.

And in eating the bread and wine, you are also to appreciate your union with Jesus Christ. While we recognize that in no way do we physically consume Christ’s flesh and blood, you are to be encouraged to recognize that you have been made one with Jesus Christ, so that His death on the cross was your death and the cross and His resurrection was your resurrection.

Gal. 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

The Heidelberg Catechism in question and answer 76 states, “Through the Holy Spirit, who lives both in Christ and in us, we are united more and more to Christ’s blessed body. And so, although He is in heaven and we are on earth, we are flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone. And we forever live on and are governed by one Spirit, as members of our body are by one soul.”

Third, in eating and drinking the Lord’s Supper, your attention is to be directed to the finished work of Christ and the fact that He physically is now present in Heaven, where He rules at the right hand of the Father.

The physical body of Jesus Christ is not present everywhere throughout creation. He is spiritually present with us. Through the Holy Spirit He dwells in us and among us. We have real fellowship with Him, but we don’t worship Him in the elements or in any other created thing.

Heb. 1:3 who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Heb. 8:1 Now *this is* the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

1Cor. 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.

3. FINAL APPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

There is no way, that you can possibly think about all the different things that communion means at once. There are also many different proper emotions that are a part of our celebration. There is true sorrow in thinking about the suffering of Christ and all that He endured. There is joy also knowing that He has risen again. There is sorrow in realizing how you have sinned against our Lord. There is joy in realizing the forgiveness that you have through Christ’s death and resurrection. We also know that part of our celebration is realizing the unity that we have with each other as members of Christ’s body.

So I don’t think the goal is each time we celebrate that you try to possibly think about each of these things or display each of the proper emotions you could have. Proper celebration isn’t because you can do each of these things. But together we do accomplish

the purpose of the meal in proclaiming the Lord's death till He comes. And this means, Lord willing, that we will have many more opportunities in doing this. And in each time that we celebrate, the Holy Spirit may help you focus on one or more of these aspects.

In light of the main focus of the sermon today, as we celebrate the meal that is set before us I would encourage you to focus on:

The forgiveness of sins through the one sacrifice of Christ

The union and communion that we have with God

Christ's triumphant reign in Heaven

Closing Hymn: 362

Benediction – Ephesians 3:20-21

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.