

During this Lenten season, we have focused our meditation upon the salutary gift of our Lord's body and blood. The Lord's Supper is a life-giving fruit, giving eternal life to the one who eats it in faith.

It is "bread from heaven," nourishing and strengthening the new man for his journey toward the heavenly promised land. It is a healing balm and medicine for the soul, an extension of Jesus' ministry of healing into the here and now.

Tonight, we continue our meditation upon the benefits of the Lord's Supper, focusing our attention on the blest communion that we enjoy in this Holy Meal.

Luther's Communion hymn: LSB 617, which we just sang: "O Lord, We Praise Thee" confesses this truth in the third stanza:

"May God bestow on us His grace and favor, That we follow Christ our Savior And live together, here in love and union Nor despise this blest Communion! O Lord, have mercy!"

Luther's hymn, along with the Scripture readings tonight, remind us that the Lord's Supper is a communion or participation with Christ and with one another.

Hear once again those words of St. Paul in tonight's Epistle in verse 16: **"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?"**

The word Paul uses here is *koinonia*. It's translated in different ways into English. Usually it's translated as "fellowship" or "participation" or even "communion."

St. Paul is teaching the Christians in Corinth that through the Lord's Supper they have union and fellowship with the body and blood of Christ.

What a blessed gift! Through the means of bread and wine, Christians come into contact with the very Son of God Himself. You have union with Christ in a way that we do not have anywhere else in this world.

For the one who believes the words of Christ, this is a very good thing. Christ, the Holy One of God, shares His holiness with those who commune.

This is an especially good thing because, in and of ourselves, we are not holy. With repentant hearts, we confess that we are unholy and unclean sinners.

By our *koinonia*—our fellowship with Adam and his unholy nature, we ourselves are made unholy. Our unclean thoughts, words, and actions make us unacceptable in God’s sight.

Jesus identifies the source of this unholiness when He says, **Matthew 15:19** “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”

So, it should cause us great joy to hear that we as unholy people can share in Christ’s holiness through participation in His holy things—namely, His body and blood in the Sacrament. Here at the altar, He invites us to enjoy a blest Communion with Him.

But there is another dimension to this idea of “communion” or “fellowship.” There is another union that takes place in the Lord’s Supper. It is first and foremost a union of the believer with Christ.

But this blest Communion results in another union—that of Christian to Christian. Our readings tonight also remind us that the Lord’s Supper is never merely a “me and Jesus” thing. Though we receive the benefits of the Lord’s Supper individually, it is never a private matter.

When you come to the altar and receive this salutary gift, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins, you also are bound and united to those with whom you commune.

St. Paul says as much in the next part of his first letter to the Corinthians in verse 17: **“Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread”**

We who are many, says Paul, become one body in the Lord’s Supper.

Since you are united with Christ, and through Him with one another, it goes without saying that you should be united in your confession of faith and reconciled with one another.

Division at the Lord’s Table is not pleasing to the Lord. And if you claim to be reconciled with Christ, yet continue to hold onto your grudges and anger toward your fellow Christian brothers and sisters, are you **not** lying to the Lord?

So, it is necessary that those who commune together are also united in faith and doctrine, and that they have no enemies at the Lord's Table.

Christians should be willing to let go of their grievances with their brothers and sisters, or they run the risk of forfeiting their own forgiveness from Christ, as we learn in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21–35).

But there is another aspect to the blest Communion with Christ and with one another that our Lord grants in the Lord's Supper that we have yet to speak about. Have you ever paid close attention to the words of the Communion liturgy?

“Therefore, with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, ever more praising You and saying . . .” (*LSB* Proper Preface).

These words remind us that we are “surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) when we are gathered at the Lord's altar.

Your departed loved ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus are part of that “whole company of heaven.” They are among those who have joined the Church Triumphant and are with Christ.

In the Lord's Supper, you have fellowship not only with Christ and with one another but also with these unseen saints, as hymn 677:4 confesses: “Oh, blest Communion, fellowship divine! We feebly struggle, they in glory shine.”

What comfort there is in knowing that we have union with our Lord Jesus Christ and with the whole company of heaven!

In this “blest Communion” of Christ's body and blood, our Lord answers a need that all Christians share: the need to have fellowship with God and with one another.

Nowhere does this happen in such a way as it does at the Lord's altar, where Christians are joined to Christ through His body and blood, and where “we who are many” are made “one body” with Christ.

May we never despise this blest Communion, but rejoice in it! Amen.