

THE DIVINE SERVICE: SACRAMENT

August 30, 2020

Today is the second half of a two-part message on Christian worship that I began last week. Like the beginning of a to-be-continued television show, we start by reviewing the previous episode.

In Christian worship we are in the presence of our eternal King in His heavenly palace. Our invitation to be here is the invocation, the name of our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, placed upon us when this one true God claimed us as His own in the water and word of our holy baptism.

While we thus have the right to be here, we spiritually are not dressed properly for the occasion and setting. We come to the door covered with the dirt and stain of our sin in God's sight. We must give them up, lay them aside and confess them. Then God Himself, through the pastor, forgives us our sins in the name of Jesus with His words of holy absolution.

Now once again clean in God's sight we step up to His throne with His own words on our lips. The Introit is an Old Testament psalm. We ask for His mercy in the Kyrie. We shout His praise with the Gloria in Excelsis. We also ask for His favor in a prayer of the day called the Collect.

Then our worship host speaks to us in readings from His written word, the Holy Bible. We then hear a message, called the sermon, which explains and applies a part of that Word of God to our Christian lives.

Using words of a creed that Christians worldwide have spoken for centuries we confess our shared and common faith. Then we speak to our King in prayer asking for what we and others need and thanking Him for all wonderful things He already has done for us. In worship we sing hymns written at different times and in many places with words that focus on Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Now we are ready for the 2nd half of the Divine Service, God's gifts to us in the Sacrament of the Altar, also known as the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.

I. Offering

In the early Christian church at this point of the service those who were not yet baptized and confirmed were dismissed from the building. The confirmed believers would stay for a sacred meal because that is why they were there.

When we are invited into the presence of an important person we should bring a special gift. It is a token of our appreciation, a sign of our thanks, and a show of our honor and respect. Of course, compared to the majesty, glory, and splendor of a king's

royalty, what we could bring to him is going to seem very small, but we still not dare arrive before him empty-handed.

In Christian worship we bring our almighty King a thank-offering, a portion of all that He first has given to us. While all things belong to God anyway and He certainly does not need our stuff to do the work of His kingdom on earth, our offerings are sign of our thanks and a measure of our appreciation for all that He has done for us and given to us. What does it say to Him if we show up in the presence of our heavenly King with our hands empty as if He does nothing for us and thus deserves nothing from us? Our gifts of thanks through our worship offerings acknowledge God as the source of all our good things.

II. The Lord's Supper

In the early church money offerings were brought forward along with gifts of bread and wine to be used for the upcoming holy meal. The pastor presides at this meal in which Jesus really is the host, mouthing words that Jesus Himself is speaking to us.

The Lord's Supper service begins with a preface. A preface in a book is the author's introduction. In the liturgy the preface introduces the holy meal. It includes a section that is appropriate to and proper for that season of the church year.

We sing the Sanctus (Latin "holy") which is a combination of the angels' song in God's Old Testament call of Isaiah to be His prophet and the shouts of hosanna in the New Testament as Jesus entered into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

We then pray thanking God for His presence among us in the life and work of His Son Jesus. We also pray for Jesus' presence to be among us now in worship and to be forever with us in heaven. We continue our prayer with the words Jesus taught His disciples to pray, what we call the "Lord's Prayer."

Then Jesus speaks those words He spoke when He gave His first followers bread as His body and wine as His blood as they observed Passover on night before Jesus was crucified. This real presence of Jesus is God's peace, wholeness, and right relationship with us.

We sing the Agnus Dei, "Lamb of God," which is the Church's earliest confession of faith. John the Baptist spoke this way when he pointed his hearers to Jesus as the One they really should follow.

Then we gather together at the altar and receive Jesus' body and blood given and shed for us on cross. Though this happened years ago, they are given to us now under the earthly forms of bread and wine, all for the forgiveness of our sins.

The Holy Spirit is present through this meal to strengthen us in faith for our daily life in Jesus' name. This action is vertical, from heaven above to us below. But it also is horizontal, between us and others. In this meal we share the confession of our public statement of faith, so we practice it as a close communion. We also look ahead to the heavenly banquet where all believers in Jesus will be united at His table.

We have one more song of celebration to sing after the meal is over. The liturgy gives us a choice of two. There is the traditional Nunc Dimittis. As a child I thought of this as the going home song. As everyone stood up to sing it, they all were putting on their coats. It was sung 1st by faithful Simeon at the temple in Jerusalem. He saw in the baby Jesus God's promise of a Savior being fulfilled. Thus, he was ready to die and go to his heavenly home. In the Lord's Supper we see Jesus as our Savior. We leave this table with a similar confidence that we are ready for our own heavenly home. The more modern option to sing is "Thank the Lord." This reminds us of the privilege we have in sharing the good news of salvation with others during the week to come.

III. Benediction

While the meal is over, the service is not quite finished. Our host has good parting words for us. These are words He has spoken to His people for some 3500 years since time of Moses, Aaron and the Israelites in wilderness traveling to the promised land of Canaan. These are God's words of blessing, favor and peace, all won for us by God's Son Jesus. As these words have been proclaimed over the centuries, they are to echo in our minds, be spoken from our lips, and show forth in our works for the next seven days.

We would not leave a baseball game during 7th-inning stretch. We do not leave a 3-act play after only the 2nd act. Likewise, we should stay in worship to hear God's final words of blessing. With the benediction and closing hymn our time here as God's people has ended for another week, but the service of our worship as God's people continues every day of our baptized lives. To God alone be all the glory! AMEN