

Holy Communion, the Sacrament of the Altar, from Martin Luther's Small Catechism



I. 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 drink.

WHERE IS THIS WRITTEN?

The holy evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and St. Paul write thus:

In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread,
and gave thanks; broke it,
and gave it to his disciples,
saying: Take and eat;
this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup,
gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink,
saying: This cup
is the new covenant* in my blood,
shed for you and for all people
for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

* Covenant means “promise”

2. 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 sins, there is also life and salvation.

3. HOW CAN BODILY EATING AND DRINKING DO SUCH A GREAT THING?

Eating and drinking certainly do not do it, but rather the words that are recorded: “given for you” and “shed for you for the forgiveness of sin.” These words, when accompanied by the physical eating and drinking, are the essential thing in the sacrament, and whoever believes these very words has what they declare and state, namely, “forgiveness of sin.”

4. WHO, THEN, RECEIVES THIS SACRAMENT WORTHILY?

Fasting and bodily preparation are in face a fine external discipline, but a person who has faith in these words, “given for you” and “shed for you for the forgiveness of sin,” is really worthy and well prepared. However, a person who does not believe these words of doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, because the words “for you” require truly believing hearts.