

We Partake of Holy Communion in Remembrance of Jesus

I was at the bedside of a certain elderly person; His life was coming to an end. He was a believer and faith was the most precious matter of his life. We spoke of faith matters, and I offered Holy Communion to him. I noticed how he calmed down and was encouraged in faith.

During Summer Services, I have admired how God's children come to partake of the Lord's Holy Communion. I have been able to experience the occasion as a time of celebration, an experience that strengthens faith. The genuineness of God's children is something which can't be found in this world.

A similar time of celebration was held a couple of thousand years ago on Maundy Thursday evening. Jesus was with His disciples partaking of the Passover meal. The disciples were used to these meal times. They were not waiting for anything unfamiliar. This time, however, Jesus distinguished this meal from normal eating and drinking.

"This Do in Remembrance of Me"

Jesus established Holy Communion on Maundy Thursday. He related that the bread which is eaten is His body and the wine which is drunk is His blood. Partaking of them is done in remembrance of Him (Luke 22:19,20).

Jesus encouraged us to remember Him. Why? Jesus had come into this world on behalf of mankind. We sing in a hymn, "Revealing God's eternal love, He came to earth from heaven above" (SHZ 347:1). Communion is a special opportunity to remember Jesus' work on our behalf and His love toward sinful man.

Jesus came from heaven to earth, lowered himself so that we could be raised. He suffered and died on our behalf. He gave His life and shed His blood so that people would receive the forgiveness of their sins and get to their destination, heaven. We can remember this atonement work and love with thankful minds.

Jesus gave thanks when taking the bread and wine. The Savior's presence in communion causes thanksgiving to rise in our hearts for His love.

Communion Gives Strength for Faith Life

It was Sunday morning and I was in church with my child. I told my four-year-old that soon we would be going to communion. I said that we receive strength and encouragement in faith from it. When we were kneeling at the altar, my son rose to stand and began to show his muscles. He stated that now he feels strong.

Communion is a sacrament or a holy act. The sacrament makes God's Word and ordinance, or command, clear (Large Catechism, the Sacrament of the Altar). The Sacrament of Communion is based on Jesus' teaching, in which He unites God's Word and the visible elements (Mark 14:22–25, Matt. 26:26–29, Luke 22:17–20). Jesus offered Holy Communion to His own, those who believed on Him. Judas, who had already fallen from faith, was also at the communion table. He did not receive repentance, nor did faith awaken in him (Mark 14:21–28). He partook of communion to his condemnation (1 Cor. 11:27–29).

The Augsburg Confession, which belongs to our church's confessional writings, states: "It is taught among us that the sacraments were instituted not only to be signs by which people might be identified outwardly as Christians, but that they are signs and testimonies of God's will toward us for the purpose of awakening and strengthening our faith. For this reason, they require faith, and they are rightly used when they are received in faith and for the purpose of strengthening faith" (Article XIII).

According to The Augsburg Confession, the sacraments should be received in faith, to strengthen faith. Jesus did not establish communion when He called His disciples, but rather when He was leaving them. He established communion to strengthen them in faith.

We do not receive the forgiveness of our sins when partaking of communion. We receive the forgiveness of our sins only in one way: by believing the absolution proclaimed by a child of God.

A child of God often feels weakness and lack of strength in faith (Matt. 25:37–39). Our feeling of sinfulness makes us humble and we often think of our own unworthiness, since we fall into sin daily. Jesus sees our struggle. He wants to encourage us to trust upon His grace. His grace is sufficient and there is power in His blood.

Communion Is a Meal of Thanksgiving and Fellowship

Communion is a meal of thanksgiving and remembrance as well as a visible sign of God's covenant. Kneeling together for this meal emphasises the unity of believers with each other and with Christ. A semicircular altar portrays the unity of all saints. One part of God's congregation has already reached the destination; the other part endeavors on this earth in the security of Jesus' blood towards heaven. In communion, we can experience unity with all the saints, even those who have reached the destination.

In establishing the Sacrament of Communion, Jesus said, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup" (1 Cor. 11:26). A child of God can go securely and freely to communion as often as it is possible. The effect of the sacrament does not depend on who serves it, but the most important thing is that it is received in faith (Augsburg Confession, Article VIII). Communion is meant for a child of God, feeling weak in faith, for strength on his journey to heaven

Juha Luukkala

Translated from Päivämies, no. 44, 2017