

## OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR.

In the same manner as we have heard regarding Holy Baptism, we must speak also concerning the other Sacrament, namely, these three points: What is it? What are its benefits? and, Who is to receive it? And all these are established by the words by which Christ has instituted it, and which every one who desires to be a Christian and go to the Sacrament should know. For it is not our intention to admit to it and to administer it to those who know not what they seek, or why they come. The words, however, are these:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and gave it to His disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me.

After the same manner also He took the cup when He had supped, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me.

Here also we do not wish to enter into controversy and contend with the traducers and blasphemers of this Sacrament, but to learn first (as we did regarding Baptism) what is of the greatest importance, namely that the chief point is the Word and ordinance or command of God. For it has not been invented nor introduced by any man, but without any one's counsel and deliberation it has been instituted by Christ. Therefore, just as the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Creed retain their nature and worth although you never keep, pray, or believe them, so also does this venerable Sacrament remain undisturbed, so that nothing is detracted or taken from it, even though we employ and dispense it unworthily. What do you think God cares about what we do or believe, so that on that account He should suffer His ordinance to be changed? Why, in all worldly matters every thing remains as God has created and ordered it, no matter how we employ or use it. This must always be urged, for thereby the prating of nearly all the fanatical spirits can be repelled. For they regard the Sacraments, aside from the Word of God, as something that we do.

Now, what is the Sacrament of the Altar!

Answer: It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in and under the bread and wine which we Christians are commanded by the Word of Christ to eat and to drink. And as we have said of Baptism that it is not simple water, so here also we say the Sacrament is bread and wine, but not mere bread and wine, such as are ordinarily served at the table, but bread and wine comprehended in, and connected with, the Word of God.

It is the Word (I say) which makes and distinguishes this Sacrament, so that it is not mere bread and wine, but is, and is called, the body and blood of Christ. For it is said: *Accedat verbum ad elementum, et At sacramentum*. If the Word be joined to the element it becomes a Sacrament. This saying of St. Augustine is so properly and so well put that he has scarcely said anything better. The Word must make a Sacrament of the element, else it remains a mere element. Now, it is not the word or ordinance of a prince or emperor, but of the sublime Majesty, at whose feet all creatures should fall, and affirm it is as He says, and accept it with all reverence fear, and humility.

With this Word you can strengthen your conscience and say: If a hundred thousand devils, together with all fanatics, should rush forward, crying, How can bread and wine be the body and blood of Christ? etc., I know that all spirits and scholars together are not as wise as is the Divine Majesty in His little finger. Now here stands the Word of Christ: Take, eat; this is My body; Drink ye all

of it; this is the new testament in My blood, etc. Here we abide, and would like to see those who will constitute themselves His masters, and make it different from what He has spoken. It is true, indeed, that if you take away the Word or regard it without the words, you have nothing but mere bread and wine. But if the words remain with them as they shall and must, then, in virtue of the same, it is truly the body and blood of Christ. For as the lips of Christ say and speak, so it is, as He can never lie or deceive.

Hence it is easy to reply to all manner of questions about which men are troubled at the present time, such as this one: Whether even a wicked priest can minister at, and dispense, the Sacrament, and whatever other questions like this there may be. For here we conclude and say: Even though a knave takes or distributes the Sacrament, he receives the true Sacrament, that is, the true body and blood of Christ, just as truly as he who [receives or] administers it in the most worthy manner. For it is not founded upon the holiness of men, but upon the Word of God. And as no saint upon earth, yea, no angel in heaven, can make bread and wine to be the body and blood of Christ, so also can no one change or alter it, even though it be misused. For the Word by which it became a Sacrament and was instituted does not become false because of the person or his unbelief. For He does not say: If you believe or are worthy, you receive My body and blood, but: Take, eat and drink; this is By body and blood. Likewise: Do this (namely, what I now do, institute, give, and bid you take) . That is as much as to say, No matter whether you are worthy or unworthy, you have here His body and blood by virtue of these words which are added to the bread and wine. Only note and remember this well; for upon these words rest all our foundation, protection, and defense against all errors and deception that have ever come or may yet come.

Thus we have briefly the first point which relates to the essence of this Sacrament. Now examine further the efficacy and benefits on account of which really the Sacrament was instituted; which is also its most necessary part, that we may know what we should seek and obtain there. Now this is plain and clear from the words just mentioned: This is My body and blood, given and shed FOR YOU, for the remission of sins. Briefly that is as much as to say: For this reason we go to the Sacrament because there we receive such a treasure by and in which we obtain forgiveness of sins. Why so? Because the words stand here and give us this; for on this account He bids me eat and drink, that it may be my own and may benefit me, as a sure pledge and token, yea, the very same treasure that is appointed for me against my sins, death, and every calamity.

On this account it is indeed called a food of souls, which nourishes and strengthens the new man. For by Baptism we are first born anew; but (as we said before) there still remains, besides, the old vicious nature of flesh and blood in man, and there are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and of the world that we often become weary and faint, and sometimes also stumble.

Therefore it is given for a daily pasture and sustenance, that faith may refresh and strengthen itself so as not to fall back in such a battle, but become ever stronger and stronger. For the new life must be so regulated that it continually increase and progress, but it must suffer much opposition. For the devil is such a furious enemy that when he sees that we oppose him and attack the old man, and that he cannot topple us over by force, he prowls and moves about on all sides, tries all devices, and does not desist until he finally wearies us, so that we either renounce our faith or yield hands and feet and become listless or impatient. Now to this end the consolation is here given when the heart feels that the burden is becoming too heavy, that it may here obtain new power and refreshment.

But here our wise spirits contort themselves with their great art and wisdom, crying out and bawling: How can bread and wine forgive sins or strengthen faith? Although they hear and know that we do not say this of bread and wine, because in itself bread is bread, but of such bread and wine as is the body and blood of Christ, and has the words attached to it. That, we say, is verily the treasure,

and nothing else, through which such forgiveness is obtained. Now the only way in which it is conveyed and appropriated to us is in the words (Given and shed for you). For herein you have both truths, that it is the body and blood of Christ, and that it is yours as a treasure and gift. Now the body of Christ can never be an unfruitful, vain thing, that effects or profits nothing. Yet however great is the treasure in itself, it must be comprehended in the Word and administered to us, else we should never be able to know or seek it.

Therefore also it is vain talk when they say that the body and blood of Christ are not given and shed for us in the Lord's Supper, hence we could not have forgiveness of sins in the Sacrament. For although the work is accomplished and the forgiveness of sins acquired on the cross, yet it cannot come to us in any other way than through the Word. For what would we otherwise know about it, that such a thing was accomplished or was to be given us if it were not presented by preaching or the oral Word? Whence do they know of it, or how can they apprehend and appropriate to themselves the forgiveness, except they lay hold of and believe the Scriptures and the Gospel? But now the entire Gospel and the article of the Creed: I believe a holy Christian Church, the forgiveness of sin, etc., are by the Word embodied in this Sacrament and presented to us. Why, then, should we allow this treasure to be torn from the Sacrament when they must confess that these are the very words which we hear everywhere in the Gospel, and they cannot say that these words in the Sacrament are of no use, as little as they dare say that the entire Gospel or Word of God, apart from the Sacrament, is of no use?

Thus we have the entire Sacrament, both as to what it is in itself and as to what it brings and profits. Now we must also see who is the person that receives this power and benefit. That is answered briefly, as we said above of Baptism and often elsewhere: Whoever believes it has what the words declare and bring. For they are not spoken or proclaimed to stone and wood, but to those who hear them, to whom He says: Take and eat, etc. And because He offers and promises forgiveness of sin, it cannot be received otherwise than by faith. This faith He Himself demands in the Word when He says: Given and shed for you. As if He said: For this reason I give it, and bid you eat and drink, that you may claim it as yours and enjoy it. Whoever now accepts these words, and believes that what they declare is true, has it. But whoever does not believe it has nothing, as he allows it to be offered to him in vain, and refuses to enjoy such a saving good. The treasure, indeed, is opened and placed at every one's door, yea upon his table, but it is necessary that you also claim it, and confidently view it as the words suggest to you.

This, now, is the entire Christian preparation for receiving this Sacrament worthily. For since this treasure is entirely presented in the words, it cannot be apprehended and appropriated in any other way than with the heart. For such a gift and eternal treasure cannot be seized with the fist. Fasting and prayer, etc., may indeed be an external preparation and discipline for children, that the body may keep and bear itself modestly and reverently towards the body and blood of Christ; yet what is given in and with it the body cannot seize and appropriate. But this is done by the faith of the heart, which discerns this treasure and desires it. This may suffice for what is necessary as a general instruction respecting this Sacrament; for what is further to be said of it belongs to another time.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, since we have now the true understanding and doctrine of the Sacrament, there is indeed need of some admonition and exhortation, that men may not let so great a treasure which is daily administered and distributed among Christians pass by unheeded, that is, that those who would

be Christians make ready to receive this venerable Sacrament often. For we see that men seem weary and lazy with respect to it; and there is a great multitude of such as hear the Gospel, and, because the nonsense of the Pope has been abolished, and we are freed from his laws and coercion, go one, two, three years, or even longer without the Sacrament, as though they were such strong Christians that they have no need of it; and some allow themselves to be prevented and deterred by the pretense that we have taught that no one should approach it except those who feel hunger and thirst, which urge them to it. Some pretend that it is a matter of liberty and not necessary, and that it is sufficient to believe without it; and thus for the most part they go so far that they become quite brutish, and finally despise both the Sacrament and the Word of God.

Now, it is true, as we have said, that no one should by any means be coerced or compelled, lest we institute a new murdering of souls. Nevertheless, it must be known that such people as deprive themselves of, and withdraw from, the Sacrament so long a time are not to be considered Christians. For Christ has not instituted it to be treated as a show, but has commanded His Christians to eat and drink it, and thereby remember Him.

And, indeed, those who are true Christians and esteem the Sacrament precious and holy will urge and impel themselves unto it. Yet that the simple-minded and the weak who also would like to be Christians be the more incited to consider the cause and need which ought to impel them, we will treat somewhat of this point. For as in other matters pertaining to faith, love, and patience, it is not enough to teach and instruct only, but there is need also of daily exhortation, so here also there is need of continuing to preach that men may not become weary and disgusted, since we know and feel how the devil always opposes this and every Christian exercise, and drives and deters therefrom as much as he can.

And we have, in the first place, the clear text in the very words of Christ: Do this in remembrance of Me. These are bidding and commanding words by which all who would be Christians are enjoined to partake of this Sacrament. Therefore, whoever would be a disciple of Christ, with whom He here speaks, must also consider and observe this, not from compulsion, as being forced by men, but in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to please Him. However, if you say: But the words are added, As oft as ye do it; there He compels no one, but leaves it to our free choice, answer: That is true, yet it is not written that we should never do so. Yea, just because He speaks the words, As oft as ye do it, it is nevertheless implied that we should do it often; and it is added for the reason that He wishes to have the Sacrament free, not limited to special times, like the Passover of the Jews, which they were obliged to eat only once a year, and that just upon the fourteenth day of the first full moon in the evening, and which they must not vary a day. As if He would say by these words: I institute a Passover or Supper for you which you shall enjoy not only once a year, just upon this evening, but often, when and where you will, according to every one's opportunity and necessity, bound to no place or appointed time; although the Pope afterwards perverted it, and again made a Jewish feast of it.

Thus, you perceive, it is not left free in the sense that we may despise it. For that I call despising it if one allow so long a time to elapse and with nothing to hinder him yet never feels a desire for it. If you wish such liberty, you may just as well have the liberty to be no Christian, and neither have to believe nor pray; for the one is just as much the command of Christ as the other. But if you wish to be a Christian, you must from time to time render satisfaction and obedience to this commandment. For this commandment ought ever to move you to examine yourself and to think: See, what sort of a Christian I am! If I were one, I would certainly have some little longing for that which my Lord has commanded [me] to do.

And, indeed, since we act such strangers to it, it is easily seen what sort of Christians we were

under the Papacy, namely, that we went from mere compulsion and fear of human commandments, without inclination and love, and never regarded the commandment of Christ. But we neither force nor compel any one; nor need any one do it to serve or please us. But this should induce and constrain you by itself, that He desires it and that it is pleasing to Him. You must not suffer men to coerce you unto faith or any good work. We are doing no more than to say and exhort you as to what you ought to do, not for our sake, but for your own sake. He invites and allures you; if you despise it, you must answer for it yourself.

Now, this is to be the first point, especially for those who are cold and indifferent, that they may reflect upon and rouse themselves. For this is certainly true, as I have found in my own experience, and as every one will find in his own case, that if a person thus withdraw from this Sacrament, he will daily become more and more callous and cold, and will at last disregard it altogether. To avoid this, we must, indeed, examine heart and conscience, and act like a person who desires to be right with God. Now, the more this is done, the more will the heart be warmed and enkindled, that it may not become entirely cold.

But if you say: How if I feel that I am not prepared? Answer: That is also my scruple, especially from the old way under the Pope, in which a person tortured himself to be so perfectly pure that God could not find the least blemish in us. On this account we became so timid that every one was instantly thrown into consternation and said to himself: Alas! you are unworthy! For then nature and reason begin to reckon our unworthiness in comparison with the great and precious good; and then it appears like a dark lantern in contrast with the bright sun, or as filth in comparison with precious stones. Because nature and reason see this, they refuse to approach and tarry until they are prepared so long that one week trails another, and one half year the other. But if you are to regard how good and pure you are, and labor to have no compunctions, you must never approach.

We must, therefore, make a distinction here among men. For those who are wanton and dissolute must be told to stay away; for they are not prepared to receive forgiveness of sin since they do not desire it and do not wish to be godly. But the others, who are not such callous and wicked people, and desire to be godly, must not absent themselves, even though otherwise they be feeble and full of infirmities, as St. Hilary also has said: If any one have not committed sin for which he can rightly be put out of the congregation and esteemed as no Christian, he ought not stay away from the Sacrament, lest he may deprive himself of life. For no one will make such progress that he will not retain many daily infirmities in flesh and blood.

Therefore such people must learn that it is the highest art to know that our Sacrament does not depend upon our worthiness. For we are not baptized because we are worthy and holy, nor do we go to confession because we are pure and without sin, but the contrary because we are poor miserable men and just because we are unworthy; unless it be some one who desires no grace and absolution nor intends to reform.

But whoever would gladly obtain grace and consolation should impel himself, and allow no one to frighten him away, but say: I, indeed, would like to be worthy, but I come, not upon any worthiness, but upon Thy Word, because Thou hast commanded it, as one who would gladly be Thy disciple, no matter what becomes of my worthiness. But this is difficult; for we always have this obstacle and hindrance to encounter, that we look more upon ourselves than upon the Word and lips of Christ. For nature desires so to act that it can stand and rest firmly on itself, otherwise it refuses to make the approach. Let this suffice concerning the first point.

In the second place, there is besides this command also a promise, as we heard above, which ought most strongly to incite and encourage us. For here stand the kind and precious words: This is

My body, given for you. This is My blood, shed for you, for the remission of sins. These words, I have said, are not preached to wood and stone, but to me and you; else He might just as well be silent and not institute a Sacrament. Therefore consider, and put yourself into this YOU, that He may not speak to you in vain.

For here He offers to us the entire treasure which He has brought for us from heaven, and to which He invites us also in other places with the greatest kindness, as when He says in St. Matthew 11, 28: Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Now it is surely a sin and a shame that He so cordially and faithfully summons and exhorts us to our highest and greatest good, and we act so distantly with regard to it, and permit so long a time to pass [without partaking of the Sacrament] that we grow quite cold and hardened, so that we have no inclination or love for it. We must never regard the Sacrament as something injurious from which we had better flee but as a pure wholesome, comforting remedy imparting salvation and comfort, which will cure you and give you life both in soul and body. For where the soul has recovered, the body also is relieved. Why, then, is it that we act as if it were a poison, the eating of which would bring death?

To be sure, it is true that those who despise it and live in an unchristian manner receive it to their hurt and damnation; for nothing shall be good or wholesome to them, just as with a sick person who from caprice eats and drinks what is forbidden him by the physician. But those who are sensible of their weakness, desire to be rid of it and long for help, should regard and use it only as a precious antidote against the poison which they have in them. For here in the Sacrament you are to receive from the lips of Christ forgiveness of sin which contains and brings with it the grace of God and the Spirit with all His gifts, protection, shelter, and power against death and the devil and all misfortune.

Thus you have, on the part of God, both the command and the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ. Besides this, on your part, your own distress which is about your neck, and because of which this command, invitation and promise are given, ought to impel you. For He Himself says: They that be whole need not a physician, but they that be sick; that is, those who are weary and heavy-laden with their sins, with the fear of death temptations of the flesh and of the devil. If therefore, you are heavy-laden and feel your weakness, then go joyfully to this Sacrament and obtain refreshment, consolation, and strength. For if you would wait until you are rid of such burdens, that you might come to the Sacrament pure and worthy, you must forever stay away. For in that case He pronounces sentence and says: If you are pure and godly, you have no need of Me, and I, in turn, none of thee. Therefore those alone are called unworthy who neither feel their infirmities nor wish to be considered sinners.

But if you say: What, then, shall I do if I cannot feel such distress or experience hunger and thirst for the Sacrament? Answer: For those who are so minded that they do not realize their condition I know no better counsel than that they put their hand into their bosom to ascertain whether they also have flesh and blood. And if you find that to be the case, then go, for your good, to St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, and hear what sort of a fruit your flesh is: Now the works of the flesh (he says [chap. 5, 19ff.]) are manifest, which are these: Adultery fornication uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like.

Therefore, if you cannot feel it, at least believe the Scriptures, they will not lie to you and they know your flesh better than you yourself. Yea, St. Paul further concludes in Rom. 7, 18: I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. If St. Paul may speak thus of his flesh, we do not propose to be better nor more holy. But that we do not feel it is so much the worse; for it is a sign that there is a leprous flesh which feels nothing, and yet [the leprosy] rages and keeps spreading. Yet as we have said, if you are quite dead to all sensibility, still believe the Scriptures, which pronounce

sentence upon you. And, in short, the less you feel your sins and infirmities, the more reason have you to go to the Sacrament to seek help and a remedy.

In the second place, look about you and see whether you are also in the world, or if you do not know it, ask your neighbors about it. If you are in the world, do not think that there will be lack of sins and misery. For only begin to act as though you would be godly and adhere to the Gospel, and see whether no one will become your enemy, and, moreover, do you harm, wrong, and violence, and likewise give you cause for sin and vice. If you have not experienced it, then let the Scriptures tell you, which everywhere give this praise and testimony to the world.

Besides this, you will also have the devil about you, whom you will not entirely tread under foot, because our Lord Christ Himself could not entirely avoid him. Now, what is the devil? Nothing else than what the Scriptures call him, a liar and murderer. A liar, to lead the heart astray from the Word of God, and to blind it, that you cannot feel your distress or come to Christ. A murderer, who cannot bear to see you live one single hour. If you could see how many knives, darts, and arrows are every moment aimed at you, you would be glad to come to the Sacrament as often as possible. But there is no reason why we walk so securely and heedlessly, except that we neither think nor believe that we are in the flesh, and in this wicked world or in the kingdom of the devil.

Therefore, try this and practise it well, and do but examine yourself, or look about you a little, and only keep to the Scriptures. If even then you still feel nothing, you have so much the more misery to lament both to God and to your brother. Then take advice and have others pray for you, and do not desist until the stone be removed from your heart. Then, indeed, the distress will not fail to become manifest, and you will find that you have sunk twice as deep as any other poor sinner, and are much more in need of the Sacrament against the misery which unfortunately you do not see, so that, with the grace of God, you may feel it more and become the more hungry for the Sacrament, especially since the devil plies his force against you, and lies in wait for you without ceasing, to seize and destroy you, soul and body, so that you are not safe from him one hour. How soon can he have brought you suddenly into misery and distress when you least expect it!

Let this, then, be said for exhortation, not only for those of us who are old and grown, but also for the young people, who ought to be brought up in the Christian doctrine and understanding. For thereby the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer might be the more easily inculcated to our youth, so that they would receive them with pleasure and earnestness, and thus would practise them from their youth and accustom themselves to them. For the old are now well-nigh done for, so that these and other things cannot be attained, unless we train the people who are to come after us and succeed us in our office and work, in order that they also may bring up their children successfully that the Word of God and the Christian Church may be preserved. Therefore let every father of a family know that it is his duty by the injunction and command of God, to teach these things to his children, or have them learn what they ought to know. For since they are baptized and received into the Christian Church, they should also enjoy this communion of the Sacrament, in order that they may serve us and be useful to us; for they must all indeed help us to believe, love, pray, and fight against the devil.