

“What is this? The Ultimate Sacrifice.” 1.Cor. 11:23-26

“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

What we are remembering today is that last fateful night, when Jesus was betrayed and delivered into hands of his enemies. It was such a shock for His disciples, something so unexpected.

Their teacher, the One who came out as a winner from all confrontations with His opponents, whom entire Jerusalem cheered when He entered the city just few days ago, about whom even His enemies said: “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!” (John 12:19) Now He was suddenly taken from them.

However, it wasn't surprise for Jesus. For quite a while He had been teaching His disciple about what is going to happen. He told it them again and again. He knew where He was heading. “I must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” (Mat 16:21)

He was preparing for this evening and He was preparing His disciples for this evening. Knowing that this was going to be their last time together, before He was betrayed and killed, Jesus wanted to make the most of it.

He wanted to leave His disciples and His future disciples, His church something very special. The Lord's Supper, the Holy Communion, the Eucharist. That's what He did as we heard it retold by the apostle Paul.

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, and said, Take and eat; this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way he took the cup, after the supper, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, Drink of it, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

So we have been doing what He said ever since. Every week. Every Sunday. Beginning right after Jesus resurrection. All around the world. Already for almost two millennia. What is this we are doing?

Why do we repeat this setting, these words, this ritual? Does it make much sense? Especially for people of 21st century? We can't make much sense of it unless we see the Lord's Supper in a way Jesus and His disciples saw it back then.

We talked a lot last year about the fact that God Himself established divine service. He, and not us, was the One who said what and how His people were supposed to do. But the most important, He explained *why* He did establish the divine service.

Not for us to serve Him, as it is so often misunderstood. No, but so that He, the Holy God, could come and be among us and bless us. These are two main reasons why God established the divine service, so that He can come to be among us and bless us. To be among us and to bless us.

But we know that the Bible testifies unanimously that sinful man can't be in God's presence and remain alive. Then how could holy God come to be among His people and how could He bless them?

Through sacrifices. Yes, through sacrificial meals. That's true. Whatever strange it may sound to us. Remember we talked again and again that rituals *do* things. It is not that important to ask what does this or that ritual mean, but what does it *do*?

A few examples. All people perform many rituals. Let's take a handshake or a hug. What do they do? They express your attitude, constitute your relationships. They can establish peace where there was an argument.

Similarly anniversaries, birthdays, state celebrations, - they all perform certain functions. Establish community, create fellowship, strengthen families and nations.

But then there are rituals given to us by God Himself. For His people in Old Testament times He gave these sacrificial meals. When we read about these sacrifices we often totally miss the point. Totally!

This is how God designed these rituals, and this is what they accomplished. Remember, sinful man can't come into God's presence. That's why everyone who wanted to receive God's blessing had to have their sins forgiven.

Sin isn't a thing that you can take lightly as our culture wishes. The wages of sin is death. That's a reality that we as sinners perish if we come into God's holy presence. It is like bringing old grass close to fire so that fire can give it some warmth and light.

The wages of sin is death. When God's people came into His presence they ritually transferred their sins to sacrificial animals. They were forgiven. Their lives were spared. Sacrificial animals received what they deserved.

These animals were brought into God's presence on the altar and their life was taken in exchange to one's who brought the sacrifice. Thus God's people received forgiveness of all their sins and safe access to holy God. But this was not all.

Do you know what happened with the meat of sacrificial animals? Everything that was brought into God's radiant presence on the altar became holy. In this case, the meat of sacrificial animals. Their meat was made holy. It is and will remain a mystery, but this meat literally contained God's blessings.

Then this meat was given to those who had brought the sacrifice, so that God could share His holiness with His people. So that He can bless them by means of these holy meals. Feeding them both, physically and spiritually with His holiness.

This is what these rituals did. Our sins were transferred to someone else. This someone else received what we deserved. We received forgiveness of sins and safe access to God. Then God shared His holiness and blessings through the holy meals, at the same time nourishing body and soul.

Now, when we have got this background, we are getting closer to the events of that fateful night, when Jesus instituted the Holy Communion, His holy meal.

Now, please, try to see it as His disciples saw it, against the background of these holy meals. Jesus “took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, and said, Take and eat; this is my body, which is given for you.” “Drink of it, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

What is He saying? Do you hear? What is He doing? Do you see? Jesus, the Son of God, identifies Himself with a sacrifice. With the ultimate sacrifice. He is the Lamb of God. He is the One who came to lay down His life for many.

He is the One who takes away the sin of the world. Being without sin He was made sin for us. All our sins were put on Him. Mine and yours. He invited us to put our sins upon Him, so that He would receive what we deserve. Death. Even death on a cross.

This is what Jesus was doing on this evening. ‘My body, given for you. My blood, which is shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins.’ Jesus didn’t explain what was the meaning of His death. He showed it in much more dramatic way, telling His disciples what He was doing for them by means of this new ritual.

Taking their sins, and ours. Your sins as well. Giving His life in exchange to theirs, and to yours. Granting for all of us safe access into God’s holy presence. In other words, Jesus was doing exactly what was done by sacrificial rituals which God gave to his people in Old Testament times, just doing it on a totally different scale. Laying down His life for the world, for entire human race once and for all. No sacrifices are required anymore.

But this is not all. Remember what happened with the meat of sacrifices in the Old Testament times? By means of this meat, by means of these sacrificial meals God shared His holiness with His people, He blessed them, strengthened, purified, protected them and so on.

Now, the Lord’s Supper. “Take and eat [...] Drink of it, all of you.” What is Jesus saying? In the holy meals the Old Testament, God shared His holiness with His people. In the New Testament, Jesus is giving Himself in His holy meal.

The Holy Communion is not only God’s blessings that comes from His presence, it *is* His presence. It is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Himself coming to us in His

Supper, by means of bread and wine, exactly as He promised. It is God's mystery and there is no way we can comprehend it or explain it. But we can receive Him and all the blessings with grateful hearts.

That's why from the very beginning the Church has kept the Lord's Supper in such a high esteem. Because Jesus Himself is coming to us. As He gave Himself as the sacrifice for our sins, He gives Himself to us in this Holy meal.

That's why it is so precious. That is God's holiness. His light, His life, the source of eternal life being given to us. We receive Him, we touch Him and He touches us, we are united with Him. That's why the Lord's Supper is such a priceless gift.

It strengthens our faith, it purifies our souls, it heals our wounds, it protects us from the evil one. For where Christ is, Satan and his angels can't be. That's why those who are struggling with their sins, or attacks of the evil one, whose faith is under attack, desperately need the Lord's Supper. They need our Lord's holy presence in us. That's what is given to us in the Communion. Something incomprehensively great.

"Do this in remembrance of me." What does this mean? Remembrance of Jesus. There has been a lot of confusion about the meaning of these words. Again, the only way we can grasp the meaning of these words is looking to the world in a way Jesus and His disciples did it.

When we today hear word 'remember' we perceive it as purely cognitive activity. To recall something into mind, bring up some kind of memories. In Biblical times 'to remember' had much richer meaning.

It still was a cognitive process, but it was meant to be a process that would lead to an action. Thus, for example, God remembered Noah after the flood. Had He forgotten about Him? No, of course not.

God remembered Israel in Egypt. Had He forgotten that they were there? No, of course not. But every time when God remembered, it led to His actions being faithful to what He had promised. To take care of Noah, to rescue Israel and to bring them into the promised land.

Thus also here we are not talking only about cognitive actions, as simply remembering what Jesus did for us. Listen what the apostle Paul is saying. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

The richness of the Lord's Supper can't be exhausted. Yes, it is about recalling all that Jesus had done and is doing for us. He took our sins, He gave His life so that we can live, He gives us His holy and precious body and blood to us in the Holy Communion.

Every time when we do as He has commanded us to do, with our actions, with the celebration of the Lord's Supper we proclaim Jesus death for us. The very celebration is the proclamation of what God has done. Every time when we receive the Holy Communion is vivid, rich, dramatic proclamation of Jesus death for us.

But there is one more dimension to it. The Lord's Supper as God given ritual makes sense for us, but not for those outside, who don't know Biblical story. Every time when we do the Lord's Supper we are commanded to proclaim it to others.

To go, to share, to tell what God has done for us. For each of us, for you, and also for each one who haven't heard this message yet. Thus every time when we do it, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are both immersed into mystery of God's sacrificial death, and also sent to proclaim it to other, until the Lord comes.

Until the Lord comes. Jesus has promised to return, to return in His heavenly divine glory and majesty, to judge the nations, to restore His creation. This is what our ultimate hope is, but before it comes to fulfillment, the Lord's Supper is the place and the time where our Lord Jesus Christ meets us and bless us.

That's the place where we are united with Him and with one another, in one body and in one Spirit. Come and taste that the Lord is good.

Amen.