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“No one saw this coming.” Matthew 26:17-30

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?” He said, “Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. And as they were eating, he said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, “Is it I, Lord?” He answered, “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” Judas, who would betray him, answered, “Is it I, Rabbi?” He said to him, “You have said so.”

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

It was with a sense of fear that I prepared this sermon. It is with a sense of fear that I am going to preach it to you. For the topic of our meditation is too great, too wonderful, I am not worthy to speak about it, nor are we worthy to receive such a message.

It is terrifying how ignorant our sin makes us, it is frightening what a stronghold our unbelief has on our hearts, it is so embarrassing how indifferent, how obtuse, how disoriented we are. We, God’s holy people, His Church, children of the Father. How much there is to repent of, more that we can possibly know!

Yet, we are so blessed, we have the Holy Writings of the apostles that give us insights in wonderful mysteries of our Triune God, in what amazing things He has done for us, and what unbelievable gifts He has bestowed upon us. May the Holy Spirit guide our meditations this evening as we remember the last night of our Lord with us and what incredible gift He left to His Church.

As decided before the foundation of the world, as promised and announced through generations of prophets, the Eternal Son of God came into this world as one of us, as Jesus from Nazareth. The Triune God Himself, the Eternal Word through whom everything was created, the Wisdom of God, His joyful companion in His work of creation, He dwelt among us. Sharing our flesh and blood.

His presence dispelled the darkness; it exposed the agents of darkness, making them scream: “Have you come to destroy us?” His words full of grace and wisdom revealed to us the truth. About the loving heart of our God and about our tragic situation.

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His truth-filled words brought unity where falsehood and divisions used to reign. And He brought peace among us. Forgiveness, reconciliation and harmony among those who used to be hostile, hardened by their sins and sins committed against them.

The Kingdom of God was breaking into this world. The ruler of this world was being pushed out. It caused desperation among his forces. They had to plot and scheme and lie and deceive, to work overtime to counter what the Son of God was doing.

And the pendulum began to swing in their favour. They manage to persuade those who had been waiting for God to fulfil His promises for millennia that this Jesus from Nazareth is a blasphemer, a friend of sinners and an enemy of God's faithful.

Resistance to Jesus' ministry grew. Despite all the signs and miracles that Jesus did, the enemy succeeded in convincing religious leaders that Jesus is the threat to their power and future, and so they began to make plans for how to put Him to death.

The enemy even found a way to poison one among the twelve of Jesus closest, Judas Iscariot, to betray his Teacher, to hand Him over to his adversaries, in exchange for a generous payout. 30 pieces of silver... The walls were closing in on Jesus. Came that last night, when everything seemed to be in place to take Him out for good.

But then... something happened. No one had seen it coming. Neither His enemies nor His friends. On that last night Jesus ordered His disciples to prepare for the celebration of Passover, the memorial meal where the great Redemption from the slavery in Egypt was remembered and the freedom to live under true God celebrated.

During that Passover meal, surrounded by His handpicked apostles, **“as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”**

We don't know how the disciples reacted to what Jesus had just said. Puzzled? Surprised? Shocked by what He had just said and instructed them to do? We don't know. But Jesus had just left to His loved ones, to His disciples, His followers, God's people, the Church, His testament, the most amazing testament ever.

He had given us this amazing gift that we know as the Lord's Supper, as the Lord's Meal, or the Holy Communion, or Eucharist, as the Holy Sacrament. Jesus knew what was coming in the next few hours, and He made a move no one could have predicted.

By giving the Church His Holy Meal, He ensured that He would remain with us until He comes again in His divine glory. He ensured that He will be present with us and in us. That He will be present not only in one physical location as during His earthly days, but wherever His disciples gather to partake in this divine gift. With this gift He had ensured that His holy presence will be with His beloved to protect you and to keep the forces of darkness away from you, to shelter you with His holiness.

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By giving the Church His Holy Meal, Jesus ensured that the truth of His message to us will be preserved, that to receive this Meal according to His instructions we will need to cherish and embrace His teaching, everything that He has commanded and that we will have to gladly strive for true unity of faith.

By giving the Church His Holy Meal, Jesus ensured that His work of delivering forgiveness and bringing peace and reconciliation among His chosen people will continue, as we will strive to follow His instruction as His brothers and sisters, both receiving the gift of His forgiveness and generously extending it in all our relationships. Do you see?!

Jesus had made sure that this Holy Meal will be creating, sustaining and expanding the Kingdom of God in this age until His return. What a deadly blow to the enemy! Where Satan was hoping to finally wipe off God's Son from the face of the Earth, Jesus had just ensured His presence to the ends of the Earth till the end of this age. Among His people.

What a masterstroke of divine wisdom! But let us not underestimate the resolve of the enemy; that will help us to understand why there have always been conflicts, confusions and strange questions surrounding this most wonderful testament of our Lord.

The enemy has got nothing against the power of the Holy Communion. Nothing! He can't take away or reduce its divine power. He can't remove God's presence in it, he can't overshadow the light of the truth that it sheds, he can't stop the flow of forgiveness and reconciliation. He can't do anything against the power of Jesus' testament.

So, he had to find another way. Which he did. If he can't do anything against God's own Holy Meal, he can certainly do a lot of things against those who are weak. He can lie, he can confuse us, he can distract us, he can trick us and trap our attention somewhere else. We are easy targets. And that is exactly what the enemy has been doing since.

Trying to poison the wonderful gift of God with his sticky lies. He has been quite creative. He would whisper: "The Lord's Supper is too holy; you should not receive it too often, so that you can fully appreciate it." And Christians abstain from it. "The Lord's Supper is just a meal of remembrance, that's all there is. You just have a bite and a sip and remember Jesus. So, it doesn't really matter what elements you use." And the deceived would believe that the Lord's Meal really is nothing more than our reminiscence.

"The Holy Meal gives you good things; you should not worry about anything bad happening to you. Don't worry about examining yourself! The Lord is gracious, that's okay if you keep sinning knowingly, He will grant you forgiveness anyway." And God's people keep on sinning without repentance as if that didn't offend the Lord.

"It is not a big deal if you receive the Lord's Meal having sinned against someone and not willing to ask for forgiveness, or to grant forgiveness. That's fine." As if the Lord hadn't warned us that if we don't forgive and reconcile, He won't forgive us.

"It doesn't matter what you believe, or what others believe, this meal is just between you and God." And God's children become indifferent to the truth and falsehood. "But you should worry that Jesus doesn't make you sick, He may promise that there is life and health and wellbeing in His cup, but who knows..." And faithful Christians worry, get

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distracted and confused. Lies and confusion, lies and deception, lies and distraction. The enemy is good at finding where we may have our weaknesses, our blind spots and then just pressing on, distracting us from what amazing gift our Lord Jesus has given to us, only to rob us of joy, comfort and peace. He never stops. We need to be aware of what the enemy does, how he may try to distract and deceive us, how easily he may hide the incredible blessings of the Holy Communion from us.

Incredible blessings of Jesus' testament, of His final gift to us! For incredible they are! Luke has recorded what Jesus said shortly before He instituted the Lord's Supper: "**I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.**" [Luke 22:16]

You probably can relate to this. Think about your loved ones. Imagine that you are about to depart, perhaps, not to see them ever again and you have prepared for them an amazing gift, a life-changing gift, full of blessings and good things. Now you are waiting for the moment when you will be able to give it to them. You just can't wait...

That was Jesus on this night two millennia ago, so earnestly desiring to give this incredible gift to each one of His loved ones. To each one of you. By granting His presence in His Supper, the Eternal Son offers you life, true life as He has true life in Himself. He offers you His holiness, nourishment of your faith and sure protection against the forces of evil.

As He instructs us to receive this gift after examining ourselves and recognizing our fallen condition and broken relationships, He offers you forgiveness, removes your guilt and shame, He grants you good conscience, reconciliation with people around you, peace, harmony, wellbeing and new life.

As Jesus gives this meal to us as an expression of our unity of faith, our shared confession, He guides you and keeps you in the truth of His Word, He grants you His wisdom, unity in the body of Christ, His Holy Spirit and His love. And He sends you to proclaim everything this Triune God has done to all the world, until the day when He comes again.

Amazing, amazing testament and gift! Given to us, unworthy. We should fervently pray that the Word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit sheds divine light in our hearts and dispels all doubts and confusion, may our God help us to trust and to appreciate the grandeur and abundance of blessings that His Meal delivers to us.

May He Himself awaken and nourish in your heart genuine awe, divine joy and wonder for this marvelous gift. Not just today, but every time you come to feast at His table. May He Himself help you to prepare to receive this gift – recognizing that we are not worthy of such grace and generosity.

And may the Lord Jesus give us all repentant hearts, desire for the truth and unity, and for peace and love among us. May He fill you with all those good things that He gives you with this ordinary bread and wine, with His body and blood, until you overflow, for that is what He earnestly desires for you.

O, Lord Jesus, help us to receive! Help us to receive what you have prepared for us!
Amen.