

1 Corinthians 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

I don't know if many people are looking any more in our day, but there was a time when a great many people spent a great deal of time and effort searching for things that had been associated with Jesus. People claimed to have found his robe, or the thorns from his crown, or the blood-stained spear which had pierced his side. You may have heard of the shroud of Turin, a centuries-old burial cloth, claimed to have been the actual shroud our risen Lord was buried in. Throughout the Middle Ages searching for such relics was a huge deal. Groups of knights would be sent on quests to find items connected to Jesus. Probably the two most sought after articles were pieces of wood from the cross and the chalice used in the Last Supper. Countless expeditions were sent out; many more stories were told and written; unbelievable efforts were expended searching for the cup from the first communion – the legendary Holy Grail. It was thought that this cup would have magical powers and bring all kinds of spiritual and physical benefits. The same for the wood from the cross from Jesus' crucifixion. Big chunks, smaller pieces, even tiny slivers of wood were taken back to churches all over Europe and the world – supposedly from *the* cross. These relics would be placed in or near altars and be given the highest honor. The problem was: how could a person be certain this wood was actually from Jesus' cross? It has been said that all the wood supposedly recovered from Jesus' cross would be enough to build several whole churches. The cross and the cup. Objects of knightly quests and pious pilgrimages. But in reality, so elusive and so uncertain. The cross and the cup. Have they really ever been discovered? Will they ever be found? The truth is, they were never missing. We need look no further than the Word of the Lord to find his cross and cup. Our quest can stop right here at the Lord's altar. For here we do find them. The cross and the cup. The cross in the cup – showing what Jesus gave and showing what we receive.

Our verse here from 1 Corinthians 11 tells us, “**For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death...**” There is a very close connection between eating the bread and drinking the cup of wine, of the Lord's Supper and the death of Jesus Christ. The Sacrament of Holy Communion cannot be separated from the cross of our crucified Savior. Whenever we take the Lord's Supper, the cross is in the cup. Whenever we eat this and drink this in remembrance of Jesus, we are reminded of what he gave. We can't help but remember because he tells us again in his Holy Word, “This is my body. This is my blood.” What Jesus gave was his body and blood. Not something easy to give. He had to die to do it. What he gave was his life. So St. Paul writes that whenever we do this, whenever we take Holy Communion, we proclaim his death. We proclaim that this mighty, eternal, divine Son of God came to earth as a man to die for us. We proclaim that he had to die to keep us out of hell. Because we weren't able to do that ourselves. No one was. See, God the Father had set some qualifications for who would be allowed into his heaven. Some strict standards, in fact perfection – never sin once and always be holy. There are no “close enough”s or “almost”s or borderline cases. It's cut and dried – perfection or damnation. That puts us all in the same sinking boat. But Jesus got us out. He took our place, took our sins, took our punishment. Up on that cross, Jesus paid for all our

lack of perfection. He took care of everything for everyone. The Father doesn't see us as defective any more. Now he sees us as people qualified for his heaven. All because of what Jesus gave on the cross. Peter says, "He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree." Paul adds, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." Jesus gave what we needed. He gave his body and blood on the cross.

And in the Lord's Supper, Jesus gives that cross in the cup. On the greatest night in the history of the world, that first Maundy Thursday, Jesus offered the first Holy Communion. On that night, Jesus was taking care of the final details in his work of salvation. His sufferings were already in progress. He knew his death was at hand. The payment transaction had already started for the sins of the world. And still Jesus gave something more – a special supper for his people. He took some of the bread and wine left over from the Passover meal. And after giving a prayer of thanks, he passed it out to his disciples. And as he distributed that bread and wine, he spoke in the clear and unmistakable terms of a last will and testament. "Take eat; this is my body. Take, drink; this is my blood." And just to make sure there was no confusion as to what body and blood he was talking about, he said, "...my body which is given for you... and my blood which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins." The body and blood Jesus was giving with the bread and wine is the exact same body and blood he gave into death on the cross. No wonder the Bible is so serious about this little bite of bread and sip of wine. Through it, with it, in it, Jesus gives his actual body and blood. No wonder God gives the strong cautions not to eat and drink without recognizing the Lord's body and blood are there. This is no small thing. Nothing to be taken lightly. In the Sacrament of Holy Communion, Jesus actually gives his own real body and blood.

With the bread and in the cup, Jesus gives the reality of what happened that first Good Friday, the cross. And already the night before that sacrifice, the reality of Jesus was taking effect. Before this time, God's people had been working with shadows and figures. They had the Passover lamb as a type of the Savior to come. They had the prophecies that Jesus would come, would live a perfect life, would suffer, would die an awful death, and would rise. But now Jesus changes all that. Instead of shadows and types, his people would have the real thing. Forget about the Passover lamb, Jesus was giving himself as the Lamb of God who really takes away the sins of the world. In Holy Communion, he gives us the real thing, the body and blood he was giving as payment to take away our sins. We're not dealing with images any more. We have the reality. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus is really giving the cross in the cup.

And that is what we receive. Since we receive the Lord's body and blood with the bread and wine, the Lord's Supper puts us right in the middle of the salvation Jesus won for us on the cross. Same body. Same blood. What Jesus gave was his life – his body and blood. What we receive is participation with our Savior, sharing with his body and blood and what it does for us – forgives us. Takes our guilt away and puts it where God never sees it again. It's a way he really individualizes our forgiveness. Reminds us, assures us, applies to us personally our forgiveness. Our new status in the eyes of the Lord. No longer a miserable sinner, but now a sparkling saint with a clean record. And with that comes all

the other benefits of being God's children. Like the catechism says, "For where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." All the blessings purchased on the cross, up to and including that eternal banquet in heaven. And realizing that, Jesus really doesn't even have to remind us to do this often. When our kids were little, and one of them was really sick, it wouldn't matter what the shot or medication or doctor visit or surgery would cost. Their health was a bargain at any price. I think that's how it is with most people. If someone came up with a surefire cure for cancer or covid-19 or whatever affliction hits you or your loved one, you and everyone else would be lining up to take the cure. Well, here in Holy Communion, we receive free the surefire remedy for what really ails us. Our sins are cleared up and salvation is ours – permanent spiritual health. The forgiveness that changes us from doomed sinner to child of God with heaven guaranteed.

And that changes our life. We are receiving something that changes our entire way of thinking and living. We take the Lord's Supper and walk away from the altar knowing we are starting over with a clean slate. Starting over. No losing streak of sins. Which makes it even easier and more exciting to get up for serving God and living a Christian life. That's why it is so important to listen to what God says about this Sacrament in his holy Word. Those that don't recognize that here Jesus gives us his body and blood, here he gives us his forgiveness – they somehow get the impression they are doing something for him instead. But there is no comfort in that. Or truth. The reality is that God has done it all. That's how we can know we really are completely forgiven. That's all God.

But there is one thing we do get to do. Paul says here, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Communion is all what God does for us. But we do get to proclaim. That's a privilege and blessing we might sometimes overlook. As we use this Sacrament, we are making a statement. We get to make a public confession of Christ and his saving work. And we get to do that together with people who believe the same way. We are all proclaiming. Which makes Holy Communion an outstanding expression of our Christian fellowship. We are one body, proclaiming together. Like it says a chapter earlier, "Because there is one bread, we who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." We are proclaiming, celebrating our oneness in faith. And the Lord's Supper can only mean that because of the connection with Jesus and what he did on the cross. So those people in the middle ages, they were right about one thing – amazing powers and super benefits can be gained by having the cross and the cup of Jesus. But we don't have to take a pilgrimage or go on a relics' quest to find them. It's right here. Here at his altar Jesus gives, and here we receive, the cross in the cup. Amen.