

**February 27**

## **How Not to Take Holy Communion**

### **Part One – Divisions and Unity**

In the devotion from yesterday (Feb. 26), St. Paul in I Corinthians 11, identified several problems with the way that the Corinthian congregation practiced Holy Communion. His starting point was divisions within the congregation.

Divisions and distinctions are not all bad – indeed, they are necessary for procreation and growth. Think of the uniqueness of men and women and the phrase repeated in creation, **“after their kind... And God saw that it was good.”** (Genesis 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25, 27, 31). In creation, we see not only the diversity of species and sexes but also the unity within “their kind.”

It's important to note that Holy Communion was given as a gift to the Church because the Church represents a separate “kind” of human. While all humans are reconciled to God (John 1:29, II Corinthians 5: 18, 19) only those who are in a faith relationship – those in *communion* with Christ – have forgiveness applied. They have the right to receive the sacrament with its benefits of forgiveness of sins, and the strengthening of their faith delivered by that sacrament.

So some distinctions are important. People who are not Christian or baptized should not be communing. Paul further adds in Chapter 11 that those who do not understand or believe in the sacramental presence of Christ's body and blood in communion should not be communing (I Corinthians 11:27 - 30). This is why St. Paul is bringing this *instruction* (v. 13, 19) and why LC-MS congregations prepare people, through catechesis, to commune.

But St. Paul is chastising the Corinthian congregation for sinful divisions **they should not practice**: elevating loyalty to certain leaders, rather than Christ (1:10 – 13; 4:1); participating in immoral lifestyles and shunning discipline (chapter 5); having lawsuits among church members (chapter 6); abstaining totally from sex within marriage or pursuing divorce (chapter 7); being arrogant or putting down “weaker saints” (Chapter 8); forgetting self-control, abusing Christian liberty, grumbling, un-Biblically elevating one spiritual gift over another, devaluing love, doubting the resurrection of the body, keeping bad company (chapters 9, 10, 12, 14, 15).

If people in a congregation believe in or practice, without repentance, any of the sins mentioned above, that situation, by its very nature, will create division and would certainly be a way **“not** to take communion.”

Communion is a celebration of reconciliation! If we are not at peace with a fellow brother or sister, we should make every effort to reconcile, calling upon the pastor and elders if an advocate is needed. However, a failure to be reconciled with a fellow saint does not mean being prohibited to commune. St. Paul said, **“inasmuch as in you lies, live at peace with all men...”** (Romans 12:18) It is the person who *refuses* to be reconciled who should not commune at that point.

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus Christ, Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world, let us come to Your feast of forgiveness unified! May we look upon ourselves and others at the communion rail as poor miserable sinners, broken and contrite in heart, unified by Your love and mercy. In Your Name, we pray. Amen.*