

## March 1

### How Not to Receive Holy Communion

#### Part 4 - Do Not Receive It Drunk! *Struggle.*

When I began my ministry in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, after several years of service, I was leading worship service on a Sunday morning when a man came into the back of the sanctuary, obviously intoxicated and raving. His cries were hard to discern. A couple of our members graciously took him outside the sanctuary, and began to talk and listen to him.

The man was not a member, but I knew him from his being a businessman in the community. Later, the fuller story emerged: the man was one of the first of many to implicate his Little League coach as being a serial child molester of many of the young children who played on that team. The man who had come into worship drunk on that Sunday, was crying in his heart for justice and restitution. The coach had no connection whatsoever to our congregation, but the man was crying out to God for justice. And he came to the right place!

One of the problems that the Corinthian church had, besides gluttony, was alcohol abuse. And this was not unique to Corinth, nor was it unique to the first century. It is as old as Noah and persists today, not only with alcohol, but also with a menagerie of intoxicants some legal, most illegal. Then, as now, the causes of alcohol and drug abuse and addiction are oftentimes deeply rooted in a traumatic experience or a toxic gene pool.

Jesus' first miracle was turning water into wine. God is not opposed to alcohol; He is supposed to alcohol abuse and dependence. When St. Paul chastised the Corinthian church for their gluttony, he also said that some were getting drunk or were drunk when they came to Communion and the meal celebration surrounding it. His response to that abuse was one word: "What!" (*I Corinthians 11:22*)

Addictions come in so many different forms we cannot keep up with them. I learned at the Drug and Alcohol Council, during one of my internships at grad school, that there is a strong genetic component to addiction. The same, of course, is true with heart disease, but cardiologists treating congenital heart failure don't give patients license to eat any diet they would like because their disease is genetically oriented. Behavior and behavior modification are still part of their care.

Sin is related to both bad genes (original sin) and bad behavior. But God is greater than our sin! "*Mercy triumphs over judgment*" (*James 2:13b*). Baptized Christians who are addicted to alcohol or drugs should not stay away from Communion because they are *struggling* with addiction. Of course, they should not come to the Lord's Table while stoned or drunk. But they should come to the table broken. Most people know we have grape juice ("fruit of the vine") for those who have health and/or alcohol concerns. I also know some alcoholics who have no problem drinking wine, either diluted with water or a very small sip. The key to managing addiction is that we are "struggling" with it. In fact, alcoholics in years of sober recovery, recognizing the struggle, still say in a 12-step meeting, "I'm an alcoholic."

Christians say, "*I am a sinner. I'm addicted to sin.*" But we are called to "resist Satan/sin" (*James 4:7*). The fact that we *struggle*, as opposed to always caving, is the key. Our struggle with this sin addiction may be poor, weak, and half-hearted, but we yet *struggle*. And that is a sign of faith.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, May dissipation not weigh me down. Lift me up with Your grace. Bless my struggle against sin. May I find grace and solace in Your blood with the wine of Holy Communion, and in Your body with the bread we break in remembrance of You and Your victory over sin. Amen.*