

"Communion Question"

Dear Antwort Mann,

I was raised Wisconsin Lutheran, and back in "the old days," we took Communion once a month and we took it seriously. In my present church, we take Communion weekly, yet I worry that many are just going through the motions without thinking about what they are doing. It seems like folks have different thoughts on what is happening during Communion. Could you give us a brief overview of how to get ready for it – what to do and not do – and what to think about it?

Signed, "Ex-Pietist, I Hope"

Dear "Ex,"

Along with the Gospel itself, and Holy Baptism, Holy Communion is one of the "Means" by which God's grace and forgiveness in Christ come to us. Holy Scripture is clear, and Luther reiterates this in the Small Catechism, that "It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and drink." In this Sacrament, Christ imparts to us His very self along with the forgiveness of our sins won by Him on the cross.

There are those who worry that by offering the Sacrament every week that it will no longer be "special," and that people may take it for granted. The same could be said about preaching, yet I don't hear people saying that sermons should be preached only once a month (even if they may think it!). The Sacrament, as is the preaching of the Gospel itself, are God's gifts for the benefit and healing of the souls of God's people. These gifts should be offered weekly, despite the fact that there may be some who take it for granted. Their abuse of the Sacrament should not be an excuse to rob from others who desire to receive it.

One way to guard against taking the Sacrament for granted is St. Paul's injunction to "let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup (I Cor. 11:28)." This examination can take a variety of forms, but the purpose is to help us approach the Supper in seriousness and faith. One helpful tool is "Christian Questions With Their Answers" found in the Catechism, and on pages 329-330 in Lutheran Service Book. The prayers found on the inside cover of LSB are also helpful.

These are not *rules* that one has to fulfill before receiving Communion, but *tools* to help in receiving it rightly. As Luther says in the Small Catechism: "Fasting and other bodily preparation are fine outward training, but he is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words, 'Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.'"

And that is how we are to think of, and approach the Sacrament. We are sinners worthy of death, but Christ comes to us and gives us His very body and blood, together with the bread and wine, for the forgiveness of our sins. Faith believes these words and promises of Christ and that makes one worthy and well prepared to receive the Sacrament.

So my advice to you is: Don't worry if others are taking the Sacrament rightly or not; make sure you are. You cannot look into people's hearts and judge their worthiness for the Sacrament. Only God can, and does do that. Simply rejoice that you have a gracious God that comes to you through all His Means of Grace to give you forgiveness of your sins. "And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."

***I Come, O Savior, to Thy table, For weak and weary
is my soul;
Thou, Bread of Life, alone art able To satisfy
and make me whole:
Lord, may Thy body and Thy blood Be for my soul
the highest good.
LSB #618***

Best Regards,
Der Antwort Mann