

The Service

Confession of Sins

M: We have come into the presence of God, who created us to love and serve him as his dear children. But we have disobeyed him and deserve only his wrath and punishment. Therefore, let us confess our sins to him and plead for his mercy.

C: **Merciful Father in heaven, I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child. But trusting him Jesus, my Savior, I pray: Have mercy on me according to your unfailing love. Cleanse me from my sin, and take away my guilt.**

M: God, our heavenly Father, has forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has removed your guilt forever. You are his own dear child. May God give you strength to live according to his will.

C: **Amen.**

Prayers for Maundy Thursday

Explanation of the Service of Holy Communion

While we are not gathered together tonight to receive the sacrament of our Lord's precious body and blood, we now continue with the communion service – except for the distribution – and include devotional thoughts to enrich our appreciation of this service. Just as Jesus Christ is proclaimed in the Word of God, He is also received in His holy Supper. Just as the gospel in the Word forgives us our sins and strengthens our faith, so the gospel in the Sacrament does the same. It's not merely a reminder or reassurance. It is the actual delivery of God's forgiveness. It may seem redundant to receive these same blessings of the gospel multiple times in the same service. One way to understand this is to view the gospel as medicine for the soul. This perspective is reflected in the writings of Ignatius, a student of the apostle John, who called Holy Communion, "a medicine of immortality." But unlike the medication that a doctor may prescribe for a patient today, we cannot overdose on the gospel. When we realize the depths of our sinful condition and the very real spiritual enemies that surround us, we will see our need for God's gospel gifts that much more. Luther says it well in the Large Catechism: Those who are mindful of their weakness desire to be rid of it and long for help. They should regard and use the Sacrament just like a precious antidote against the poison that they have in them. In the Sacrament, you are to receive from the lips of Christ forgiveness of sin. It contains and brings with it God's grace and the Spirit with all His gifts, protection, shelter, and power against death and the devil and all misfortune.

After each devotional commentary, please speak the elements of the service with me.

Preface

This opening greeting and the short responses that follow are among the most ancient elements of the Liturgy, found in nearly every ancient communion rite. Our modern use of these ancient responses is an example of honoring the history of the church in the context of our worship today. The preface dialogue, especially the second and third pairs, invite us to have a spirit of thanksgiving as we participate in this holy meal. Paul refers to the cup of wine as the “cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks” (1 Corinthians 10:16). Scripture tells us that our Lord gave thanks in connection with the institution of the Sacrament. These responses also set a joyful mood for the celebration of Holy Communion.

M: The Lord be with you.
C: *(spoken)* **And also with you.**
M: Lift up your hearts.
C: *(spoken)* **We lift them up unto the Lord.**
M: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.
C: *(spoken)* **It is good and right so to do.**

Sanctus

The Sanctus has been a part of the celebration leading up to Holy Communion in worship since at least the fourth century. The opening words of the song come from Isaiah 6:3. As Isaiah receives his divine call to serve as the Lord’s prophet, he sees a vision of angels around the throne of God saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” To the angels’ words are added the praises of the Palm Sunday crowds, who shouted in Matthew 21:9, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” The holy and almighty Lord Jesus Christ has come among his gathered people in worship. He answers our cries of “Hosanna!”—a Hebrew word that means, “Save us, please!”—by coming to us in the Sacrament where he gives us his true body and blood that saved us from sin, death, and hell. Recognizing these truths, it is only fitting that we anticipate our reception of the Lord’s Supper with this fitting song of praise that brings together the praises of heaven and earth and the words of the Old and New Testaments.

M: It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who brought he gift of salvation to all people by His death on the tree of the cross, so that the devil, who overcame us by a tree would in turn by a tree be overcome. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY *(Sanctus)*

C: *(spoken)* **Holy, holy, holy Lord God of heavenly hosts: heav’n and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he, blessed is he, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest.**

Words of Institution

Among many Christians, the words of Jesus that we refer to as the Words of Institution are nothing more than an historical report: this is what Jesus did and what he said. Period. We have been blessed to know, however, that these words mean much more. They do what they say. According to the command of Christ, we celebrate the Lord's Supper not as a mere meal of remembrance but as a Sacrament by which Jesus himself comes to us. We don't transport ourselves back in time; rather, he comes to us. Until we are in heaven he comes as our defender and deliverer. He gives his own body and blood as the medicine of immortality. Here we find strength for our journey to heaven.

M: Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: *(spoken)* **Amen.**

Agnus Dei

The song is a beautiful little confession of sins as we come forward, confident that do we receive his forgiveness in the Supper. The text reminds us that Jesus is the sacrifice that all of the Old Testament sacrifices pointed to. His sacrifice on the cross has won the forgiveness of sins for the entire world, and we come forward to the altar to personally receive his gift of forgiveness. The body he gave and the blood he shed as a sacrifice on the cross are now received in the Sacrament. Luther wrote, "The Agnus Dei, above all songs, serves well for the sacrament, for it clearly sings about and praises Christ for having borne our sins and in beautiful, brief words powerfully and sweetly teaches the remembrance of Christ."

O CHRIST, LAMB OF GOD

C: *(spoken)* **O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.**

O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.

**O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world,
grant us your peace. Amen.**

The Distribution

Tonight, sadly, we must forego the distribution. But it is appropriate for us to crave what God gives us in this sacrament: to quote the Catechism, "where there is forgiveness of sin there is also life and salvation." Forgiveness is not only God dealing with my guilt and its consequences. It is also spiritual nutrition by which he regularly nourishes my relationship with him and medicine by which he heals my spiritual illness. What a precious gift! What a loving Lord to so feed us and strengthen us! So we look forward to the day when the current crisis has abated and we can again gather in the Lord's house.

Nunc Dimittis

After receiving the Lord's Supper, we often join in singing the Song of Simeon. Simeon was a man who got to see and hold the newborn baby Jesus. God had promised Simeon earlier in his life that he would not die until he saw the long-promised Messiah. God kept that promise. When Mary and Joseph brought the newborn Jesus into the temple for the first time to present him to the Lord, Simeon took the baby up in his arms and sang the words of this song. What fitting words for us to sing after receiving the Lord's Supper! We too have seen and have touched the Lord's body and blood, which have come to us in a physical way in the bread and wine of the Supper. So we like Simeon can depart from the Lord's house in peace, assured that our sins are forgiven and that we are right with God.

SONG OF SIMEON (*Nunc Dimittis*)

C: (spoken) **Lord, now you let your servant depart in peace according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.**

Thanksgiving

After the Song of Simeon, the pastor addresses the people: "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good." The congregation responds: "and his mercy endures forever." These are words from Psalm 118—part of the ancient Jewish liturgy for high festivals. This Psalm was sung after the Passover meal. It was during the Passover meal that Jesus, the Lamb of God, instituted the Lord's Supper. It is only appropriate then that we say the same words that the people of God have sung for centuries after this meal. Because of the forgiveness of sins that has just been given to us, our hearts are filled with thanksgiving for what God has done for us through the Passover Lamb—his Son, Jesus. The word we translate as "mercy" is the Hebrew word for God's faithful love. Even though we have been unfaithful to God, God's faithful love endures forever. It will never go away. God's faithfulness, goodness, and mercy comfort us as we enter another week of life in this sinful world.

M: O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

C: (*spoken*) **And his mercy endures forever.**

The Aaronic Blessing

Ever since the days of Moses and Aaron, the words of this blessing from Numbers chapter 6 (22-27) have been heard by the people of God as He puts His name upon His people and blesses them. And so dear friends, ...

M: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.

C: (spoken) **Amen.**