

24 March 2005
Maundy Thursday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Food and Drink of Life”

Text: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (Exodus 12:1-14; John 13:1-17, 34)

Tonight, Jesus gave a precious gift to His Church. His Supper. The Lord’s Supper. The very same body and blood that would, in just hours now, hang on the cross, Jesus first gives as food and drink to His disciples. For He knows they will need it. He knows we will need it.

In a world gone mad and steeped in sin, we need it.
In bodies filled with sin and dying, we need it.
We need Him, in us, to give us life. To give us His life, in the forgiveness of our sins.

And so He promises to be with us and feed us, as often as we do this, “in, with, and under” simple bread and wine.

He is not just in Heaven, watching us from a distance.

He is not present with us in the way that He is present everywhere – a way unavailable and unknowable to us.

He is not present here only symbolically, or in our act of remembering.

No, the same body and blood that walked on this earth;

the same body and blood that touched the sick and healed them;

the same body and blood whose voice raised the dead;

the same body and blood that ate and drank with sinners;

the same body and blood that hung on the cross, was laid in the tomb, and then

Himself rose from the dead –

that body and blood is here for you.

To feed you; to touch and heal you; to forgive you; to give you life. Because He knows that you need it. You need Him.

And tonight we remember this precious gift of Jesus to His Church.

We remember that this was so important *to Jesus* that He gave it on the night in which He was betrayed, and we remember that it is so important *for us* that Jesus instructed His disciples to keep doing this; keep eating and drinking; **as often as you do this.**

This was to be not a once a year commemoration, like the Passover meal that we heard about from Exodus.

No, this is much more than a memorial.
Much more than a re-enactment.
This is the real thing.
The real body and blood.
Real food and drink.
Real life and forgiveness.
Real communion with God.

And so as often as you need it, He is here for you.
As often as you want it, He is here for you.
As often as you hunger and thirst for God, He is here for you.
Do not delay, do not neglect, but come and receive Him who is here to give you life.
Take eat. Take drink.

But is this eating and drinking really *that* important? As important as I am making it out to be?

Perhaps a modern day example can remind us just how important this food and drink is – the case of Terry Schiavo.

Terry Schiavo is the lady in Florida whose feeding tube was removed this week. And there are a lot of debates going on – in the courts, in the media, and among many people – as to whether or not removing that tube is ethical and the proper thing to do.

But there is one point that is beyond dispute; one point on which everyone *agrees* – that without the food and drink received from that tube, Terry is going to die. No one knows exactly when. Maybe sooner, maybe later. But without food and drink, she cannot live.

And the same is true for you and I, spiritually.

We need the spiritual food and drink given to us by Christ in His Word, and in His Word joined to the physical *things* of His Sacraments.

We need the nourishment, strength, forgiveness, and life here given to us.

These are our “spiritual life support systems,” without which we will die.

For without His forgiveness, our sin will consume us.

Without His life, death will destroy us.

And without His salvation, eternal spiritual death awaits us.

But connected to Christ – via the “feeding tube” of His Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament – we live. He feeds us with all that we need.

And not so that we *barely* live, but that we can live a full and abundant life; a hopeful and confident life.

Knowing that the one who wanted to remove that feeding tube from us, namely Satan, has been defeated for us in God’s court of law. His accusations and charges against us –

of our unworthiness, of our sin, of our not being good enough to receive such life from God – all has been silenced by Christ on the cross.

And Christ's death and resurrection has insured that His food and drink, His body and blood, would be here for us always, and will never be taken away.

And so as often as you need it, He is here for you.

As often as you want it, He is here for you.

As often as you hunger and thirst for God, He is here for you.

Take eat. Take drink.

Now is it true that there are times when we do not hunger and thirst for God's food? For His life and forgiveness and salvation and strength?

Sadly it is true.

You know it from your own life.

But this too is a trick and deception of the devil.

For if he can not convince God to remove your feeding tube, he wants to convince you that you don't need it. Or that there are other sources of spiritual food and drink just as satisfying, just as good, just as fulfilling.

But it's not true.

In fact, just the opposite is true.

For, as Luther once remarked, if you feel no hunger and thirst for God's food and drink, it is not a sign that you don't need it, but a sign of just how much sin and death and devil are taking hold of you. (*The 1529 Holy Week and Easter Sermons of Dr. Martin Luther*, Sermon for Maundy Thursday morning, CPH 1999, p. 71ff.) It is a sign of how far gone we are.

So do not trust your thoughts or feelings.

Your thoughts which may tell you that you are doing so well that you do not need this food and drink so much, or your thoughts that tell you that you are doing so poorly that you are not worthy of this food and drink.

Do not listen to your feelings which may tell you that you are full enough, or that you only need to eat and drink once in a while, or that this is only for *others* – who don't doubt so much, or struggle so much, or sin so much *as you!*

Do not listen to any of that! No!

Listen and cling instead to the Word of God, the words of Christ, given to you when He gave you this food and drink.

His Word which said that this is **FOR YOU**.

You personally.

For He knows we need it. Oh, how much we need it!

And so mere hours before He goes to His death,
before He ascends the cross with your sin,
to hang between God and you as your substitute,
as your payment,

He gives this gift as the means to give to you what He is about to earn for you.
Food for your soul.

Take eat. Take drink.

His body and blood, for the forgiveness of your sins.

His body and blood, for the strengthening of your faith.

His body and blood, to give you life.

And thus alive with His life, ***“love one another, just as I have loved you.”***

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.