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The Benefit of the Sacrament of the Altar—The Christian's Training Table

IN TRAINING

Emmitt, a sophomore at state university, is sitting at the team training table eating whole-grain bread, lean meat, and plenty of vegetables. In the past, he had followed his natural inclination to spend all his time with old friends at the local "greasy cafe," loading up on chips and dip, pies, ice cream, and anything covered with chocolate. The result was flab, fatigue, freshman failure, and no football.

The coach changed all that. Now Emmitt follows a menu that is helping him grow stronger and healthier, and an exercise plan that keeps him active. It isn't easy, but he has lots of support. He feels a part of the team.

Emmitt had a problem; his coach had a plan. Now let's look at a bigger problem we all have and at God's greater plan.

WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

Our natural inclination is to sin. We are by nature sinful and doomed to failure. But God changes that. He has a plan for us centered in forgiveness through Jesus' death and resurrection. He calls us to repentance, leading us to confess our sins and turn to new life in Christ. And He has a plan to help us continue in faith, growing stronger and healthier spiritually. So, what's on the menu? (See Acts 2:42.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

1. What does our participation say about our relationship to Christ?

2. What does it say to the others communing with us?

This is a significant witness declaring who we are united with by faith in Christ.

WITH WHOM DO YOU EAT?

In 1 Corinthians 10:14-21, the apostle Paul was concerned about some Christians who were eating the meat sacrificed to idols. By association, they were becoming partners with unbelievers, and participants in their worship.

Instead, in verses 16-17, Paul calls the Christians to eat the Lord's Supper with other faithful Christians, and by association, affirm that they believed the same Word and promise of God.

This section of Scripture clearly points out that when we take the Sacrament—or refuse to take it, for that matter—we are speaking a powerful message to others.



TAKE A LOOK AT THE RESULTS

What are the benefits of eating healthy foods like lean meat, fruit, and vegetables?

As stated in Matthew 26:28, the benefit of eating at the Lord's Table is forgiveness. But there are other benefits flowing from forgiveness. We could say, *forgiveness is the whole ballgame*. "For where there is forgiveness there is also life and salvation."

The Benefit of the Sacrament of the Altar

What is the benefit of this eating and drinking?

These words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words.

For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

1. How are *forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation* related?

2. What benefit do hearing God's Word and eating at the Lord's Table have for a Christian's daily life?

FORGIVENESS—THE "WHOLE BALLGAME"

We toss around the word *forgiveness* so much that we tend to take it for granted and maybe even take it lightly.

1. Consider which of these situations involves real forgiveness.

a. A man standing in line turned quickly and his elbow struck the arm of the woman behind him.

"Forgive me," he said.

"Sure," she said in response.

b. A man wasn't paying attention to his driving and struck a young girl with his car. The hospital reported that she was crippled by the accident and would never walk again. The man tried to forget what happened, but couldn't. He kept reliving the accident over and over in his mind. Finally he got up courage to visit her.

"I'm so sorry," he said. "Can you ever forgive me?"

"I already have," she replied.

2. It is not easy to truly forgive. There are many feelings to overcome—anger, frustration, pride, a desire for revenge, a desire to punish. The Lord, justifiably, has cause to be angry at sin. What are some of the things He hates? (Proverbs 6:16-19)

c. Peter used strong words. He spoke the Word of God (the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ). What power made 3,000 people repent and believe? (Check **verse 33.**)

THE POWER OF THE SACRAMENTS

Read Part III of the catechism section on Baptism and Part III of the catechism section on the Lord's Supper ("How can water do such great things?" and "How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?").

1. Where does the power of the Sacrament lie according to both sections?

2. Who brings that power and puts it into effect, offering faith and forgiveness?

3. In your own words—finish these statements:

Without the Word, the water in Baptism is

It can do

to save us.

Without the Word, the bread and wine in Communion is

It can do

to save us.

III. The Power of the Sacrament of the Altar

How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?

Certainly not just eating and drinking do these things, but the words written here: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." These words, along with the bodily eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament. Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: "forgiveness of sins."

POWER FOR US

Because the Holy Spirit is working through the Word, a powerful miracle happens in Communion. Instead of just bread and wine, Jesus also offers Himself to us.

1. What are the blessings we receive as we receive His body and blood?

2. How do we receive these blessings Christ offers in the Sacrament?

3. What words are we to believe?

You may feel ordinary or even insignificant. You may feel weak or unworthy. But just as God the Holy Spirit can work through ordinary water, bread, and wine, He can work through ordinary people like you and me. When we hear His Word, He works in our hearts to give us faith and to give us power to live a life of faith.

PLUGGED INTO THE POWER

Jamie's little train worked once it was plugged into the power source. When we are "hooked up" to God's Word and Sacrament—when we receive the body and blood of Christ in faith—we are empowered. Read the following passages and note what each one says the Spirit's power working through the Word does for us as God's children.

1. Acts 1:8

2. Ephesians 3:16

3. John 14:26

4. 2 Peter 1:3

POWER THROUGH YOU

Jamie's little train had the potential to be a useful toy. It had all the parts—engine, track, cars—everything it needed to go—except power.

We all have potential because each of us has special gifts from God. And God works in us, empowering us, enabling us to use these gifts. Some people are good students, good athletes, or good musicians. Some are good at working with their hands, using their voices, listening to problems, or seeing solutions. Some are good at humor or encouragement.

1. What are your special gifts? What are you interested in or good at?



2. Now think about the power of God's Spirit in you. How can you make your gifts and talents available to the Spirit? How can you let Him make your talents and abilities touch others with the love of Jesus? In what way can you use your gifts for others?

This week I can

In the future I can

3. As you use your God-given gifts wisely and for the benefit of others, what are you also doing? (See 1 Corinthians 10:31 and Colossians 3:17.)

TO REVIEW AND REMEMBER

The Power of the Sacrament of the Altar.

Proverbs 3:5: Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

Luke 1:45: Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.

Hebrews 11:1: Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.