



The Sacraments

FOUNDATIONS IN FAITH





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Sacraments

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Edited by Kenneth Wagener and Mark S. Sengele

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CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Session 1—Baptism	5
Session 2—Baptism	14
Session 3—Confession and Absolution	23
Session 4—The Office of the Keys	31
Session 5—The Sacrament of the Altar	39
Session 6—The Sacrament of the Altar	48

LEADERS NOTES

Session 1	56
Session 2	59
Session 3	62
Session 4	65
Session 5	68
Session 6	71

INTRODUCTION

The Foundations in Faith series is an introduction to the truths of God’s Word as presented in Luther’s Small Catechism.

Why Study the Catechism?

In the Early Christian Church, God’s people confessed their faith and witnessed to the world in brief creeds. “Jesus is Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:3). “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory” (1 Timothy 3:16). These passages from the New Testament, along with others, gave believers short, concise statements of faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. In time, the Church wrote and adopted new creeds to explain more fully the basics of the Christian faith.

The Church also wrote and adopted catechisms as summaries of the major doctrines of Holy Scripture. At first, catechisms were tools for teachers. With the invention of the printing press, catechisms were printed for pastors, teachers of the faith, and parents to use within the congregation and at home.

Luther’s Small Catechism, published in 1529, covers the Six Chief Parts of Christian doctrine. In Luther’s words, the catechism “is a short summary and epitome of the entire Holy Scripture” (Large Catechism, Preface). It is a summary and guide for believers as they learn and reflect on the truths of God’s Word.

The Foundations in Faith series explores Luther’s Small Catechism in four parts: The Ten Commandments, The Apostles’ Creed, The Lord’s Prayer, and The Sacraments. The study guides may be used in any order (although the sequence in the catechism is preferred), and are designed as an *introduction* or *refresher* course for congregational or personal use. Ideally, participants will learn how the catechism presents God’s Word in a clear, understandable way, in order to bring God’s people to faith in Christ and to a daily life shaped and empowered by Word and Sacrament.

May God bless your study of His Word in the catechism!

1

BAPTISM

Pray Together

Baptismal waters cover me
As I approach on bended knee;
My Father's mercy here I plead,
For grievous sins of thought and deed.
Baptismal waters cover me;
Christ's wounded hand has set me free.
Held in my Father's strong embrace,
With joy I praise Him for His grace. Amen.

(LSB 616:1, 5)

Discover

God gives us new birth through water and the Word. In Holy Baptism we receive, through faith worked by the Holy Spirit, our heavenly Father's rich gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ.

Introduction

“The right tool for the task at hand.”

Everyone uses tools—carpenters, dentists, artists, farmers, and technicians. Tools are critical in our work. We rely on hammers and brushes and multimillion-dollar instruments to accomplish our tasks. As one poet has observed, we are “tool-using animals,” and without tools, we are nothing.

- What tools do you use in your work? your life?

- In what sense do our tools “finish” our work?

God uses ordinary tools—means—to bring His salvation into our lives. Through the Word and the Sacraments, the Holy Spirit works to give us new birth and life in Christ.

Sacraments are sacred acts, instituted by God, in which God has joined His Word of promise to a visible element. In the Sacraments, God offers, gives, and seals the forgiveness of sins earned by Christ Jesus.

Sacraments, together with the Word, are called *Means of Grace*. God gives His grace—His forgiveness—through the ordinary means He has chosen: words, water, bread, and wine. Confession and Absolution is also regarded as a means of grace: through the spoken Word, Christ forgives sins. Although Confession and Absolution does not normally include a visible element, it is, like Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, one of the ways God offers, gives, and seals His rich forgiveness in Christ.

The Catechism

What is Baptism?

Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God’s command and combined with God’s word.

Which is that word of God?

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

To *baptize* means to apply water by immersing, washing, pouring, or similar action. In the Old Testament, God’s people used ordinary water to cleanse and purify. Christian Baptism, too, uses ordinary water, but Baptism is more than “just plain water.” Baptism is a sacred act, instituted by Christ, to give and seal salvation to us *personally*.

In his Large Catechism, Martin Luther writes:

Let us not doubt that Baptism is divine. It is not made up or invented by people. . . . For it is of the greatest importance that we value Baptism as excellent, glorious, and exalted. (LC IV 6–7)

1. Describe how God’s name, authority, and power are present in Baptism.

2. In what ways is Baptism an “excellent, glorious, and exalted” gift of God to His people?

3. What memories do you treasure about a special Baptism in your family or among your friends?

The Holy Spirit uses the tools of God’s Word and Sacraments to create and sustain faith. Baptized into the kingdom of God, we are nurtured by the Word and the Lord’s Supper. Through these tools God keeps us in faith.

God's Word

Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

"I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor and gather His wheat into the barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on Him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:5–17)

4. What is John's role in baptizing "with water for repentance"?
In what ways does his mission point to Christ?

5. Why, do you suppose, did Jesus come to be baptized by John?

6. How is the triune God present at Jesus' Baptism?

How is the triune God present in Baptism today?

God instituted Baptism. God called John the Baptizer to prepare His people for the coming of the Messiah through a "Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3). This may strike us as strange because this was before Jesus completed the work of our redemption. But God always promised forgiveness of sins, even in Old Testament times, and urged repentance. Jesus Himself consented to this Baptism "of John," thereby showing His solidarity with all human beings, who are in need of repentance and salvation, and demonstrating His willingness to live the perfect life in our place (His passive obedience). Of course, Baptism took on much greater meaning after Jesus' death and resurrection on the completion of our redemption.

Today, Christ is present in His Church to baptize through His called ministers—pastors. Infants and children are included in the Lord's command; adults, at any age and in every land, are also included in His promise. The Church baptizes and teaches the faith, or the Church teaches the faith and then baptizes. In both cases, people repent of their sins, trust in Christ as Savior and Lord, and receive the gifts of the new birth.

The Catechism

What benefits does Baptism give?

It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

Which are these words and promises of God?

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16)

Although Baptism uses ordinary water, Baptism gives extraordinary blessings.

Baptism works forgiveness of sins: "And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:38).

Baptism rescues from death and the devil: "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of

His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13–14).

Baptism gives eternal salvation: “He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).

In His death and resurrection, Jesus has won forgiveness, life, and salvation for the whole world. Through Baptism, He gives these gifts to His people individually.

7. What do the benefits (blessings) of Baptism reveal about our natural condition before Baptism and faith?

8. In what ways is Baptism like new birth?

9. How does each of the benefits (or blessings) of Baptism relate to your everyday life?

Baptism is our new birth.

When we were baptized, God the Holy Spirit, working through water and the Word, brought us into God’s kingdom. In our Baptism we find our identity as children of the heavenly Father. In our Baptism we see demonstrated the extravagant love of God for us. He takes us, born in sin and under the wrath of God, and makes us His own.

What a continual comfort and encouragement it is to be baptized in Christ, to know that He cared for us so much and loved us so much that He made us His own dear children! And as children we are also heirs of the Father, heirs of the free gift of eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus.

(Words of Promise, p. 17)

God’s Word

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” So Philip ran to him and heard him reading

Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

“Like a sheep He was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so He opens not His mouth.

In His humiliation justice was denied Him.
Who can describe His generation?
For His life is taken away from the earth.”

And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. (Acts 8:26–40)

10. What opportunity does the Holy Spirit present to Philip?
How does Philip make the most of the opportunity?

11. What does the Ethiopian ask after hearing Philip’s message?
What, therefore, did Philip preach about Baptism and faith?

12. In what ways is Baptism always a joyful celebration for God’s people?

“Take Me to the Waters to Be Baptized” is an African American spiritual sung by slaves during the service of Holy Baptism. As the congregation made its way to a river or creek, God’s people remembered the gift of forgiveness and salvation in water and the Word.

Baptism washes away sin. Baptism identifies us with Jesus. We are baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We are adopted into His family, made His children in Christ. Through Baptism, we belong to God.

God's People Pray

Gracious Father, through the Baptism of Jesus You have shown that You are "God with us." Through our Baptism into His death, You have connected us to His life. Help us to give witness to all that You have done for us, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

A Verse a Day

Sunday: And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

Monday: Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? (Romans 6:3)

Tuesday: We were buried therefore with Him by Baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)

Wednesday: For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Galatians 3:27)

Thursday: And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11)

Friday: There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one Baptism. (Ephesians 4:4–5)

Saturday: Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word. (Ephesians 5:25–26)

BAPTISM

2

Pray Together

O gracious Lord, with love draw near
To these, Your children gathered here;
The Spirit's gift in them renew:
The gift of faith that clings to You.
Lord, keep them firm in their intent
To You, Your Word and Sacrament.
O make them bold, their faith to share
And make them strong, each cross to bear. Amen.

(LSB 599:1, 4)

Discover

In Baptism, God gives His people grace and strength for our journey through life. United with Christ's death and resurrection through faith, we die to sin and live as His forgiven, renewed people in the world.

Introduction

“If we had a keen vision of all that is ordinary in human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow or the squirrel’s heartbeat” (George Eliot).

Amid all the demands and rush of life, sometimes we miss the extraordinary blessings in the most ordinary packages.

- What simple, ordinary events in life often go unnoticed and unappreciated?

- What extraordinary blessings have you received in ordinary packages?

The Catechism

How can water do such great things?

Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God’s word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Titus chapter three:

“He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.” [Titus 3:5–8]

Water is water. When pure, water has no taste, color, or odor. Yet water refreshes like no other beverage, brings beauty and sparkle to gardens, lakes, and oceans, and enables plants and trees to blossom with the sweetest fragrances in the world.

The water of Baptism is ordinary water. It has no extraordinary powers in itself, yet it is an essential element in the sacrament. Water signifies. Water communicates. Water teaches.

Water makes the abstract concrete, the invisible visible. The water of Baptism helps us to see what Baptism really does for us.

1. Describe the connection between the water of Baptism and God's Word.
2. How does water illustrate the power of Baptism to *give life? cleanse? renew? kill? save?*
3. In what ways does the commonness of water help you remember your Baptism?

In his Large Catechism, Luther notes:

Understand the difference, then. Baptism is quite a different thing from all other water. This is not because of its natural quality but because something more noble is added here. God Himself stakes His honor, His power, and His might on it. Therefore, Baptism is not only natural water, but a divine, heavenly, holy, and blessed water, and whatever other terms we can find to praise it. This is all because of the Word, which is a heavenly, holy Word, which no one can praise enough. (LC IV 17)

God's Word

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." . . .

But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, I

thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant." (2 Kings 5:1-3, 8-15)

4. What expectations did Naaman have about Elisha's healing power?

5. In what ways is Elisha's prescription both *natural* and *supernatural*?

6. How do you see God's healing power at work in ordinary ways?

or

How does the story of Naaman remind you of your Baptism?

Amazing results through ordinary means. God enters our world in an unremarkable way—the birth of a baby. God works in earthly, material ways—touching children, healing lepers, feeding hungry crowds. God reveals His salvation in an undistinguished and “unspiritual” way—a Roman cross.

Jesus’ death and resurrection are God’s chosen way to save the world. Baptism is God’s chosen means to bring salvation—amazing results through the cross and the empty tomb—into our lives.

We were baptized with ordinary water, the same kind of water with which we quench our thirst and wash our hands. . . .

But the power of forgiveness does not rest in the water—for when the water was applied, these words were spoken: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

I believe this promise. In faith I take hold of my Lord Christ and all He has done for me in His life and suffering and death. In faith I receive in the water of Baptism all that He has promised. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

(Best of Portals of Prayer, p. 131)

The Catechism

What does such baptizing with water indicate?

It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Where is this written?

St. Paul writes in Romans chapter six: “We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” [Rom. 6:4]

The *Old Adam* is the corrupt and evil nature that all people inherit through Adam’s sin. Although we are declared righteous and completely forgiven in Christ, the old, sinful nature still affects our minds, our wills, and our behavior. We sin every day.

The *new man*, or *new nature*, is our life in Christ—our minds, will, and behavior transformed by the saving grace of God as we trust in Christ. Through Baptism, God creates the new man.

Through the ongoing power of Baptism, God daily recreates the new man as we grow in faith and service to Christ.

7. In what ways do you see the Old Adam in your life?

8. Describe how Christ *alone* brings forth the new nature in God's people.

9. What joy do you have in your new life in Christ?

Water has many uses. It can be used for cleansing, for refreshment, for helping things grow. Many of these images are reflected in Baptism. One image, though, is often overlooked: Water can kill. Baptism does kill. Paul reminds us of that when he says that “we were . . . buried with [Christ] through baptism into death.”

Baptism brings death, death to our old ways of thinking and acting. Baptism says that our problem is not that we need a few minor moral adjustments. It's not that we need improvement. Rather, Baptism says that we are so enslaved to sin that nothing less than daily death will do. That's what Martin Luther was getting at when he said that baptizing with water and the Word means “that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

With the daily deaths to sin come the daily resurrections, where “just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Since we daily die and rise in remembrance of our Baptism, in daily repentance, we need not fear death because we have been practicing for it each day.

(Best-Loved Passages, p. 232)

God's Word

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God. (Acts 16:25–34)

10. Describe the jailer's predicament with the prisoners.

11. In what ways do Paul and Silas show their faith and new life in Christ?

12. How does Christ change the jailer's family?

God's People Pray

Father in heaven, at His Baptism in the Jordan River, You proclaimed Jesus Your beloved Son and anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. With Your Spirit empower all who are baptized into His death and resurrection. Strengthen us to live in the covenant You have made with us in Christ. Help us boldly to confess our Savior, as we wait for Your heavenly kingdom. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

A Verse a Day

Sunday: We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (Romans 6:6)

Monday: [You were taught] to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires. (Ephesians 4:22)

Tuesday: And to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:23–24)

Wednesday: And [Jesus] said to all, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23)

Thursday: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Friday: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19)

Saturday: “Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

3

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Pray Together

Lord, to You I make confession:

I have sinned and gone astray,
I have multiplied transgression,
Chosen for myself my way.

Led by You to see my errors,
Lord, I tremble at Your terrors.

For Your Son has suffered for me,
Giv'n Himself to rescue me,
Died to save me and restore me,
Reconciled and set me free.

Jesus' cross alone can vanquish
These dark fears and soothe this anguish. Amen.

(LSB 608:1, 3)

Discover

God commands all people to repent and seek His mercy. In Confession and Absolution, we approach God in humility and sorrow, acknowledging our sin, and in faith receive His absolution: forgiveness in Christ.

Introduction

A character in a Shakespeare play, when he seems oblivious to the Chief Justice's questions, remarks, "It is the disease of not listening, the malady of not marking, that I am troubled withal" (*Henry IV, Part II 1.2.121*).

Lack of listening may not be a disease, but it is a common experience for all people.

- Why is listening difficult?

- What kinds of things do we miss when we do not listen?

The Catechism

What is confession?

Confession has two parts.

First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

God speaks through His Word. The Scriptures, Martin Luther noted, contain both Law and Gospel:

Through the Law, God reveals what we are to do and not to do; the Law shows us our sin and the wrath of God.

Through the Gospel, God reveals what He has done, and still does, for our salvation; the Gospel shows us mercy and salvation in Jesus Christ.

Terry Dittmer writes:

At heart, confession and absolution is listening to God.

Through His Law, God speaks a word of judgment. We are guilty. We then acknowledge, and openly confess, that we have sinned. We have disobeyed God. We have hurt other people.

Through the Gospel, God speaks His word of forgiveness and life. We listen. We receive His forgiveness. We rejoice in His mercy and love in Jesus Christ.

(*Keeping the Faith*, by Terry K. Dittmer, copyright © 1997 by Concordia Publishing House, p. 109.)

1. What do we “listen” to when we confess our sins? What do we listen *for* in Absolution?
2. In what ways do Confession and Absolution *summarize* Law and Gospel?
3. What riches come into our life as we listen to God speak in His Word?

In confessing our sins to God, we plead guilty—completely! No sin is hidden from God’s sight. We cannot cover up or trivialize our failure to do what God commands in His Word. We speak to God the truth we know in our hearts: “Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You may be justified in Your words and blameless in Your judgment” (Psalm 51:4).

Yet the most important part of confession is the Absolution, in which we receive pardon and peace from God. In the Gospel, God announces and bestows His mercy: “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

In Christ, God speaks and we are forgiven!

God's Word

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14)

4. Contrast the two men's attitudes and prayers.

5. In what ways do God's people at times demonstrate the attitude of the Pharisee?

6. What comfort do you have to know that God, in Christ, is merciful to you, a sinner?

At times, the past seems like a ball and chain: we are enslaved by memories of our failures, our guilt and shame, our sin. As we try to run fast and far away, we only drag the shackles along with us.

If our past could be forgiven, then we would have the chance to be freed for new living each day. We would be able to acquire the ability to forget those things that are behind and press on to better living for each new day.

That is what Christ does for us. He stands between us and our past and absorbs all the sin and shame that come charging after us. He lays down a protecting barrier of His mercy and grace in front of all our pursuing enemies. Christ not only is our hope for an uncertain future, but He is our hope for our imperfect past. And in His strength we can live a new life each new day.

(Words of Promise, p. 24)

The Catechism

What sins should we confess?

Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer; but before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts.

Which are these?

Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm?

7. Describe how the Ten Commandments confront us with our sinfulness before God *and* before others.

8. What blessings do God's people receive in private confession with their pastor?

9. “When I urge you to go to Confession, I am doing nothing else than urging you to be a Christian” (Brief Exhortation to Confession 32). Explain.

In worship, God’s people confess their sins to God and to one another in a public, corporate setting. We may also confess our sins against God in a private setting—with our pastor. Private confession is an opportunity to acknowledge the particular sins that burden our hearts and minds and hear Christ speak—through our pastor—His word of forgiveness. Trusting God’s Word, we receive the pastor’s absolution as God’s own absolution, spoken in Christ’s place and by His command.

God’s Word

And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.” Then David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.”

Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. And I gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ . . . David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you

have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die.”(2 Samuel 12:1–10, 13–14)

10. How does Nathan’s parable reflect David’s own sinful actions toward Uriah and Bathsheba?

11. Describe David’s repentance.

12. What assurance does God—through Nathan—give David? What assurance does God—through His ministers—give His people today?

God’s People Pray

Gracious and merciful God, You forgive the sins of all who come to You with repentant hearts. Give us true repentance. Help us to acknowledge our sins and to find in You forgiveness and restoration, wholeness, and peace. Hear us as we pray through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Redeemer. Amen.

A Verse a Day

Sunday: Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your steadfast love; according to Your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. (Psalm 51:1)

Monday: Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. (Psalm 19:12)

Tuesday: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)

Wednesday: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Thursday: Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:16)

Friday: As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:12)

Saturday: Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. (Psalm 32:2)

4

THE OFFICE OF THE KEYS

Pray Together

O Jesus, let Thy precious blood
Be to my soul a cleansing flood.
Turn not, O Lord, Thy guest away,
But grant that justified I may
Go to my house at peace with Thee:
O God, be merciful to me! Amen. (LSB 613:3)

Discover

God has entrusted the Church with a holy mission: to forgive sin. In the Office of the Keys, Christ gives the Church and its called servants the authority to forgive sins or withhold forgiveness in His name and strength.

Introduction

The president of the United States, on behalf of the citizens of the nation, performs various functions as chief executive. Using the authority bestowed on him or her by the American people, he or she both welcomes and negotiates with foreign ambassadors and dignitaries, representing the full power and authority of the United States.

- What other kinds of offices or positions involve actions performed in the stead and by the authority of others?
- What misunderstandings can occur when persons act on behalf of others? What benefits can result?

The Catechism

*What is the Office of the Keys?**

The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent.

*Where is this written?**

This is what St. John the Evangelist writes in chapter twenty: And when [Jesus] had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” [John 20:22–23]

* This question may not have been composed by Luther himself but reflects his teaching and was included in editions of the catechism during his lifetime.

“The door is open.” “The door is locked.” The difference makes all the difference in the world! “Come in.” “No admittance.” The distinction is critical.

The authority Christ gave to the Church to forgive or withhold forgiveness is like a key: it opens the door to heaven by forgiving sins or closes the door to heaven by not forgiving sins.

The Office of the Keys is God’s way of applying His Word in our world. It is the Church’s special calling, mission, and ministry, carried out by Christ’s called ministers, to bring Law and Gospel to individuals.

1. “The Office of the President.” What do these words, imprinted on stationery, signify about the letter? the message?

2. How does God's Word *unlock* heaven? How does God's Word *lock* heaven?

3. "Only Christ Jesus can forgive sins." Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.

Who is forgiven? Who is not forgiven?

- Those who repent and ask for forgiveness are to be forgiven.
- Repentant believers—those who are sorry for their sins and trust in Christ as their Savior—receive God's forgiveness.
- Those who do not repent or ask for forgiveness are *not* to be forgiven.
- Unrepentant sinners do not receive God's forgiveness.

God's Word

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:13–19)

4. What mistaken beliefs about Jesus did people have in His day? What mistaken beliefs about Jesus do you see in our day?

5. In what ways is Peter's confession the *Church's* confession?

6. How does Jesus commission the Church to carry on His ministry in the world?

Is God's Word true? Can we know with certainty that we are forgiven?

We can be as sure as the unbreakable promises of God. He has promised the gift of an eternal life to all who put their trust for salvation in Christ. We can bank on the promises of God without taking a chance. We cannot be sure of our eternal life because we feel it, because we want it, and certainly not because we deserve it. We can be sure of eternal life only because God promised it to all who confess their sin and in faith accept the cleansing through the sacrifice of the Savior.

In Baptism every Christian is anointed [with] the Holy Spirit, who brings us into the holy Christian church to enjoy the salvation which Christ purchased on the cross. By faith

we are clothed in Christ's righteousness, and if we abide in Him, we shall never be ashamed before Him at His coming at the end of time.

(Best of Portals of Prayer, p. 275)

The Catechism

*What do you believe according to these words?**

I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.

* This question may not have been composed by Luther himself but reflects his teaching and was included in editions of the catechism during his lifetime.

7. Describe how pastors act on behalf of Christ and with His authority.

8. Why is it necessary to “exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation”?

9. What is God's desire and goal for all people, including openly unrepentant sinners?

God's Word

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:9–16)

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Timothy 4:1–5)

10. From Paul's instruction to Timothy (which is also God's instruction to His Church), what are some of the responsibilities of pastors?

11. Why is Christian preaching and teaching often rejected by people outside *and* inside the Church?

12. In what ways can the Body of Christ—the Church—support and foster our pastor’s ministry?

God’s People Pray

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe. You have poured out upon us Your never-ending love by giving Your Son, Jesus Christ, to be crucified for our salvation. Strengthen the ministry of Your Church to bring Jesus’ love to all the world. In His name we pray, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

A Verse a Day

Sunday: Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:18)

Monday: For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them. (Matthew 18:20)

Tuesday: But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

Wednesday: The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Psalm 51:17)

Thursday: Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

Friday: This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. (1 Corinthians 4:1)

Saturday: Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

5

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

Pray Together

O Lord, we praise Thee, bless Thee, and adore Thee,
In thanksgiving bow before Thee.

Thou with Thy body and Thy blood didst nourish
Our weak souls that they may flourish:

O Lord, have mercy!

May Thy body, Lord, born of Mary,
That our sins and sorrows did carry,
And Thy blood for us plead

In all trial, fear, and need:

O Lord, have mercy! Amen.

(LSB 617:1)

Discover

In the Lord's Supper, Jesus gives His body and blood, truly present and offered in bread and wine, to convey and seal His saving work. By eating and drinking in faith, we receive His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Introduction

Wills are personal documents. Drawn up as a final, binding statement, a will is a public testimony to one's life, cherished beliefs, and legacy. It names beneficiaries. It grants rights and possessions to heirs. A will reveals the heart of the individual who made it, signed it, and leaves it.

- In what ways are wills important today?

- What would you include in your will today? How you like to be remembered through your will?

The Catechism

What is the Sacrament of the Altar?

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 to drink.

Where is this written?

The holy Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul write:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Throughout the history of the Church, the Sacrament of the Altar has been called the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, the Breaking of Bread, Eucharist, and Holy Communion. The various names for the Sacrament show that God's people have treasured this meal as a gift from the Lord, to be received and celebrated with joy, in faith and fellowship with Christ.

The words Jesus spoke at the first Lord's Supper are especially important in the Sacrament. On the night He was betrayed, Jesus instituted His Meal as a "last will and testament," an unchangeable witness to His sacrificial work. His body would be given over to death, and His blood would be shed, at the cross. The Lord's Supper, then, is a "communion" or participation in Christ's death: His body and blood given and shed for the forgiveness of sins.

1. "On the night when He was betrayed." What does the setting of the Lord's Supper reveal about Jesus' words as a "last will and testament"?

2. In what ways do we remember Jesus as we eat and drink the Lord's Supper?

3. What thoughts and feelings do you have as you approach the Lord's Table?

An ordinary meal of bread and wine—by some standards, it is an unimpressive legacy.

[Jesus] did not leave us earthly wealth, He had something much better. He gave us His life, so that we might have pardon and peace with God. On the cross of Good Friday, His body was broken and His blood shed for the remission of our sins. In the Holy Sacrament He imparts to us that body and blood. Here are His express words: “Take and eat; this is My body . . . Drink . . . this is My blood of the covenant.”

All that our Lord speaks and does in this sacrament constitutes His last will and testament. Insofar as it is His will, the words express what He wants us to do: “eat,” “drink,” “do this in remembrance of Me.” As His testament it offers, conveys, and seals to us what Christ has gained for us by His life, death, and resurrection. Thereby He gives us the riches of spiritual life in Him and eternal life to come. This is His legacy.

(Every Day with Jesus, p. 378)

God’s Word

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

“Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord’s Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute

judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast.” (Exodus 12:1–14)

4. In what ways is the Passover a community meal?

5. How does the Passover meal anticipate God’s mighty rescue of His people in slavery?

6. In what ways does the blood of the sacrificed lamb remind you of Jesus?

As God used Moses to lead His people to the Promised Land, so He called on Jesus to lead all His people to the promised home of heaven.

But there was more than the Passover meal. Jesus gave His disciples the meal of His precious body and blood. As the Passover meal recalled the deliverance from Egypt, so Holy Communion recalls God’s love for humanity that Christ fulfilled on the cross. But it does more than recall.

In His meal of Holy Communion our Savior gives us what He used to purchase our forgiveness and salvation: His precious body and blood. Not only do we recall His suffering and death each time we partake of this meal, but we also receive the forgiveness of sins, salvation, and the power of Christ for our faith and life. What spiritual nourishment this is!

(Best of Portals of Prayer, p. 371)

The Catechism

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.

The greatest blessing of the Lord’s Supper is forgiveness: God’s rich grace that Christ earned for us at the cross. All the other blessings of forgiveness—life, salvation, joy, victory over sin—are given through the Lord’s Supper as Christ strengthens our faith and nourishes us to serve Him.

In the Large Catechism, Martin Luther notes:

We must never think of the Sacrament as something harmful from which we had better flee, but as a pure, wholesome, comforting remedy that grants salvation and comfort. It will cure you and give you life both in soul and body. For where the soul had recovered, the body also is relieved. [LC V 68]

7. In what ways is the Lord’s Supper like a shared meal among family members? In what ways is the Lord’s Supper *more* than an ordinary meal?

8. How does the Lord’s Supper demonstrate our unity in Christ?

9. Why does God want His people to participate regularly in the Lord’s Supper?

God's Word

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if He were going farther, but they urged Him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So He went in to stay with them. When He was at table with them, He took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him. And He vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?" And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of the bread. (Luke 24:28-35)

10. In what ways do the disciples on the road to Emmaus represent believers as we journey through life?

11. What aspects of the meal together "open" the disciples' eyes to see Jesus?

12. How does regular participation in the Lord's Supper keep your eyes focused on Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord?

God's People Pray

Lord Jesus, thank You for the remembrance of Your passion You have given in Your Holy Meal. You invite us to participate in the Sacrament of Your body and blood, that the fruits of Your forgiveness may be evident in our lives. Keep us strong in faith, and let Your Word dwell in our hearts and minds always. You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

A Verse a Day

Sunday: And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42)

Monday: The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16)

Tuesday: For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26)

Wednesday: Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. (1 Corinthians 5:7)

Thursday: For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. (Hebrews 10:14)

Friday: Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

Saturday: I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

6

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

Pray Together

O Jesus, blessèd Lord, to Thee
My heartfelt thanks forever be,
Who hast so lovingly bestowed
On me Thy body and Thy blood.

Break forth, my soul, for joy and say:
What wealth is come to me this day!
My Savior dwells within my heart:
How blessed am I! How good Thou art! Amen.

(LSB 632)

Discover

Through faith we receive the blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation in the Lord's Supper. By the power of His Word, Christ is truly present in the bread and wine with His body and blood to bless His chosen people.

Introduction

Albert Einstein was teaching a course at Princeton University. He filled the blackboard with complex equations. At the close of the class he put instructions for cleaning the board. Across the many numbers and symbols he wrote one word: ERASE. But in one corner, above the equation $2 + 2 = 4$, he put: DO NOT ERASE!

- Why, do you suppose, did Einstein want to keep $2 + 2 = 4$?

- In what ways is it easy, in a complex world, to lose simple truths?

The Catechism

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.”

Like Baptism, the Lord’s Supper offers, gives, and seals forgiveness by the power of Christ’s Word with the visible elements.

Martin Luther writes,

It is the Word, I say, that makes and sets this Sacrament apart. So it is not mere bread and wine, but is, and is called, Christ’s body and blood [1 Corinthians 11:23–27]. For it is said, “When the Word is joined to the element or natural substance, it becomes a Sacrament.” . . . The Word must make a Sacrament out of the element, or else it remains a mere element. [LC V 10]

1. What do you believe about the benefit of eating and drinking? of eating and drinking the Lord’s Supper?

2. Describe, in your own words, the power of Jesus' Word.

3. In what ways is the Lord's Supper a simple truth in a complex world?

John Pless has written:

Our Lord is the host at His Supper. He invites sinners to be His guests, for the content of His testament is the forgiveness of sins. It is not our pious actions, our prayers, our feelings of worthiness or unworthiness that make the Supper what it is but the faithful and effectual Word and work of the Lamb who was slain. That Lamb, without spot or blemish, has carried our sins to the cross. He drained dry the cup of suffering, the cup of God's wrath. Now He gives us, along with His body, another cup to drink. This cup is the new testament in His blood. When we receive the Sacrament, we proclaim Christ's death.

(Best of Portals of Prayer, p. 234)

God's Word

While He was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before Him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus rose and followed him, with His disciples. And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His garment, for she said to herself, "If I only touch His garment, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her He said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, He said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at Him. But when the crowd had been put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. And the report of this went through all that district. (Matthew 9:18–26)

4. What do both the ruler and the woman believe about Jesus?

5. In what ways is Jesus' presence also His power?

6. What comfort do you have in knowing Christ is truly present for you in His Supper?

The Lord first gave His body and blood to His disciples in this Holy Supper on the night in which He was betrayed. He then told them: "Take, eat, this is My body . . . Drink all of it, this is My blood." He had a very special blessing in mind for them. In every need they would have the effective memory before them of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ giving His body into death for their sins and shedding His blood for their forgiveness. Always they would need this special Supper in which the Lord gave them His body and blood.

We are aware of our own sins. We recognize our need for the Lord's grace and forgiveness. Why not accept our Lord's invitation to His table and among our chief problems lay before Him our own indifference? The Holy Spirit will give us new appreciation of our Lord's gracious blessings. So we pray to Him, "Lamb of God, I come, I come!"

(Best of Portals of Prayer, p. 203)

The Catechism

Who receives this sacrament worthily?

Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words "for you" require all hearts to believe.

“Am I worthy?” On our own, apart from the grace of Christ, our answer is no. But through faith we stand before God in Christ’s righteousness. By grace Jesus invites us to His Supper. Through faith we are worthy to approach the table and eat and drink His body and blood.

Although external preparation for receiving the Lord’s Supper is good (for example, fasting, prayer, meditation), God desires first that we have faith in Christ and His Word.

7. Why might God’s people feel unworthy to come to the Lord’s Supper?

8. What makes a person worthy to receive Christ’s body and blood in the Sacrament?

9. Why should persons with a weak faith be encouraged to attend the Lord’s Table?

In His Word, God encourages us to examine ourselves as we come to the Lord’s Supper. We may ask these questions:

- Am I sorry for my sins?
- Do I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior?
- Do I believe His Word: “This is My body . . . This is My blood?”
- Do I, with the Holy Spirit’s help, plan to change my sinful ways?

As we answer yes! to each question, we rest assured that we are worthy—by God’s grace—to receive the body and blood of Christ in His Supper.

God’s Word

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, “This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and

so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Corinthians 11:23–29)

10. Why should God's people examine themselves before attending the Lord's Supper?

11. Why is it important for the church to *not* keep those who are worthy from receiving the Lord's Supper? Why is it important for the church to keep those who are not worthy from participating at the Lord's Table?

12. In what ways are you grateful to God for the Word and Sacrament ministry in your congregation?

God's People Pray

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe.

You have poured out on us Your love by giving Your Son, Jesus Christ, into death for us. Nourish Your Church through the Sacrament of His body and blood. Strengthen us so that we may continue to proclaim our Lord, who gives life to the world. In the name of Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

A Verse a Day

Sunday: And all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:3–4)

Monday: For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. (1 Timothy 4:8)

Tuesday: I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin. (Psalm 38:18)

Wednesday: For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

Thursday: Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Friday: Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24)

Saturday: Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (1 Corinthians 11:28)

LEADERS NOTES

The format for each session is similar. For notes on how to guide participants through the parts of the Study Guide, see session 1.

As you prepare to lead the session,

- read the Study Guide and answer the questions as fully as possible.

As you prepare for your time together,

- arrive early to make sure the setting is comfortable.
- greet participants by name.
- introduce participants to one another.
- thank participants for their time and commitment.
- keep in mind that sometimes participants may be reluctant to share their thoughts about some issues. Help participants see that God's solid Word guides us as we apply Law and Gospel to our lives. In Christian love we can discuss difficult issues, even though at times we may differ on how God's Word can be applied to our lives.

1 BAPTISM

Pray Together

Use the prayer as you begin the session.

Discover

Read aloud the session theme.

Introduction

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, the brief introduction to the session. In general, spend 5–10 minutes on the introduction questions.

Allow participants to write down and share aloud their questions.

- Answers will vary.
- Answers will vary. Encourage participant discussion on the theme that without the proper tool it is difficult, if not impossible, to finish the job.

Read the introductory paragraph on the sacraments.

The Catechism

Read the questions and explanations on Baptism from the Small Catechism. Read aloud, or invite a volunteer to read aloud, the paragraphs and questions in the study guide.

Invite participants to share their responses.

1. God's name is present in "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." His authority and power are present whenever and wherever He gives His name to His people to use in faith.

2. Accept participant responses.

3. Answers will vary.

God's Word

Invite a participant to read aloud this portion from Holy Scripture. Use the questions for reflection and discussion on the text.

4. John prepares the people for the Messiah by calling them to, and baptizing them for, repentance. He pointed to the coming one, Jesus, as the Savior who gives faith to His people.

5. Jesus came to be baptized to "fulfill all righteousness," that is, to reveal Himself as the Righteous One who fulfills God's righteous plan to save the world from sin, death, and the devil.

6. At Jesus' Baptism, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were present, just as the three persons of the Trinity are present today in Christian Baptism. Note the comment about the relation between the Baptism by John and Baptism following Jesus' death and resurrection after point 6 in session 1.

The Catechism

Invite a participant to read the questions and explanations on Baptism from the Small Catechism. Allow participants to reflect on and answer the questions.

7. Forgiveness, rescue from death and the devil, and salvation reveal that we were sinners, separated from God and enslaved, in need of salvation.

8. Accept participant responses. Baptism is new birth, through water and the Word, to new life in Christ. We become God's children, adopted into His family, through Baptism.

9. Encourage participant responses on the benefits (blessings) of Baptism in their daily life.

God's Word

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, this portion of Holy Scripture. Then answer the questions and share your answers.

10. The Holy Spirit gives Philip an opportunity to witness to the Good News of Christ. Philip “seizes the moment” to share the truth of Scripture and God’s plan of salvation.

11. The Ethiopian wants to be baptized; it is clear, therefore, that Philip spoke to him about Christ, His death and resurrection, and how God brings the blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation into our lives through Baptism.

12. Accept participant responses.

God's People Pray

Use the prayer as a closing devotion. If you wish, include special prayers for needs of participants, your congregation, your community, the nation, and the world.

A Verse a Day

Encourage participants to read and memorize the Bible verse for each day.

2 BAPTISM

Pray Together

Use the prayer as you begin the session.

Discover

Read aloud the session theme.

Introduction

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, the brief introduction to the session. In general, spend 5–10 minutes on the introduction questions.

- Answers will vary.
- Answers will vary. Encourage participant discussion.

The Catechism

Read the question and explanation on Baptism from the Small Catechism. Read aloud, or invite a volunteer to read aloud, the paragraphs and questions on the meaning of Baptism.

Invite participants to share their responses.

1. The water and the Word are inseparable. The water receives its power only in that it is connected with the Word of God. Yet God connects His Word with water, and not other substances. No one should substitute another substance for water in Holy Baptism.

2. Just as water gives life, renews, cleanses, kills, and saves on a physical level, the water of Baptism thus provides rich pictures of God’s saving Word at work to give life, renew, cleanse, kill, and save.

Luther’s explanation is clear. The fact that the twenty-first-century mind has trouble understanding the power of Baptism (or other doctrines of Scripture) does not mean they are not true. We speak of “the mysteries of faith.” But we have become so used to “proof” and “scientific” explanations that we mistakenly tend to believe that only what is *material* is *real*. Interestingly, a number of developments today seem to make it more acceptable to believe in the spiritual or nonmaterial (nonbiblical New Age ideas are only one example). We are here dealing with the reality of God and the power and effectiveness of God (if God is, then . . .). Therefore, it is not really so difficult to understand that little children can believe. The Holy Spirit is real.

3. Accept participant responses.

God’s Word

Invite a participant to read aloud this portion from Holy Scripture. Use the questions for reflection and discussion on the text.

4. Naaman expected Elisha to give a dramatic display of God’s power in his healing ministry. He thought, in effect, that God works in spectacular ways to impress human beings. In reality, God often works in simple, ordinary ways to accomplish His purpose.

5. Elisha’s “prescription” is natural in that God uses an ordinary element—natural water; it is supernatural in that God’s almighty Word is connected with the water.

6. Accept participant responses.

The Catechism

Invite a participant to read the questions and explanations from Luther’s Small Catechism. Allow participants to reflect on and answer the questions.

7. Answers will vary, but allow participants to share their struggles with sinful thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions.

8. Christ alone, through His Gospel, brings forth the new nature in God’s people. We cannot and do not contribute anything to our salvation. The Holy Spirit works through the Gospel to bring about growth in faith and holiness—sanctification—in us.

9. Accept participant responses.

God's Word

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, this portion of Holy Scripture. Then answer the questions together.

10. The jailer's predicament was that if prisoners escaped, he was held accountable and was usually put to death. The Philippian jailer was ready to kill himself and spare his family the disgrace of a public execution.

11. Paul and Silas immediately announce, "We are all here!" They want to prevent any loss of life, show themselves as model prisoners, and look for an opportunity to witness to their faith in Christ.

12. The jailer and his family receive the Gospel, are baptized, and begin a new life of joy.

God's People Pray

Use the prayer as a closing devotion. If you wish, include special prayers for needs of participants, your congregation, your community, the nation, and the world.

A Verse a Day

Encourage participants to read and memorize the Bible verse for each day.

3

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Pray Together

Use the prayer as you begin the session.

Discover

Read aloud the session theme.

Introduction

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, the brief introduction to the session.

- Answers will vary.
- Answers will vary. Encourage participant discussion.

The Catechism

Read the question and explanation from the Small Catechism. Read aloud, or invite a volunteer to read aloud, the paragraphs and questions on the meaning of Confession and Absolution.

Invite participants to share their responses.

1. In confessing our sins, we listen to God's words, in particular the Law. The Law shows us our sin. Yet we can also listen to our own conscience and our words and actions that clearly tell us about our failures to live as God desires. In Absolution, we listen for God's word of forgiveness in Christ.

2. Confession and Absolution summarize the Law and the Gospel by first pointing out God's demands and our failures, and then pointing to Christ as God's solution and our comfort and hope. Encourage participants to explore the meaning of Confession and Absolution through the prism of Law and Gospel.

3. Accept participant responses.

God's Word

Invite a participant to read aloud this portion from Holy Scripture. Use the questions for reflection and discussion on the text.

4. Accept participant answers. The Pharisee's attitude and prayer revolve around his accomplishments, his piety, and satisfaction with his life. The tax collector's attitude and prayer focus solely on his inadequacy and God's mercy.

5. Answers will vary, but accept participant responses.

6. Accept participant responses.

The Catechism

Invite a participant to read the questions and explanations on Confession. Allow participants to reflect on and answer the questions.

7. Answers will vary, but may include references to the First Table (Commandments 1–3) and our failure to fear, love, and trust God above all things, to worship Him properly, etc. Participants may also refer to the Second Table (Commandments 4–10) and our failure to love and treat others as we love and treat ourselves.

8. Answers will vary, but may include personal encouragement, one-on-one forgiveness, support, and Christian sympathy.

9. Martin Luther viewed Confession and Absolution as the daily rhythm of Christian life—living in repentance and faith in Christ. Encourage participants to explore the meaning and richness of Luther's statement.

God's Word

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, this portion of Holy Scripture. Then answer the questions and share your answers together.

10. The parable mirrors Uriah's life and David's action in taking Bathsheba from her husband for his own sinful purpose. Encourage participants to explore the parallels between the story in 2 Samuel 11 and Nathan's parable.

11. David's repentance is immediate, direct, and sincere: "I have sinned against the LORD." Confronted by God's Word spoken through the prophet, David has no place to run and hide; he is guilty and condemned by his own judgment. If time permits, explore as a group Psalm 51, David's confession.

12. God gives David assurance of forgiveness; in the same way God speaks His word of pardon and peace to us through Absolution.

God's People Pray

Use the prayer as a closing devotion. If you wish, include special prayers for needs of participants, your congregation, your community, the nation, and the world.

A Verse a Day

Encourage participants to read and memorize the Bible verse for each day.

4 THE OFFICE OF THE KEYS

Pray Together

Use the prayer as you begin the session.

Discover

Read aloud the session theme.

Introduction

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, the brief introduction to the session.

- Answers will vary, but may include governors, senators, representatives, political leaders, etc.
- Answers will vary. Encourage participant discussion.

The Catechism

Read the questions and explanations from the Small Catechism. Read aloud, or invite a volunteer to read aloud, the paragraphs and questions on the Office of the Keys.

Invite participants to share their responses.

1. Accept participant responses. In general, the imprint carries the full authority and power of the office. The letter in itself indicates that the message is important and should be taken seriously by readers.

2. God's Word in the Gospel unlocks heaven; that is, it brings forgiveness and eternal life to those who believe in Christ and receive His Good News. God's Word in the Law locks heaven, in that God's judgment rests on those who refuse to believe and receive His forgiveness in Christ.

3. It is true: only God forgives sins. Jesus Christ is true God. Yet Jesus also commissions His ministers to act on His behalf and with His authority. The Absolution spoken by His Church, then, is not a human word but a divine Word—spoken by God through human beings.

God's Word

Invite a participant to read aloud this portion from Holy Scripture. Use the questions for reflection and discussion on the text.

4. Some people in Jesus' day thought He was simply a prophet raised from the dead or a teacher sent from God or a holy man with supernatural powers. Others, of course, thought He was a false prophet and teacher (see John 7:12–13). Encourage participants to identify mistaken views of Jesus in our world (e.g., a spiritual guide, an ancient source of wisdom, etc.).

5. Peter's confession of Jesus as Christ, the Son of the living God, is the Church's confession. The confession was not merely a human response to Jesus' preaching and teaching, but a Spirit-worked confession of God's truth.

6. Jesus commissions the Church to carry on His ministry of forgiving repentant sinners and proclaiming God's abiding judgment on unrepentant sinners.

The Catechism

Read the question and explanation from the Small Catechism. Then answer the questions and share your answers together.

7. "The Christian congregation by the command of Christ calls pastors to carry out the Office of the Keys publicly in His name and on behalf of the congregation" (*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, p. 223). Pastors speak Absolution in the name of and with the authority of Christ. The pastoral office is instituted by Christ and given to the Church to continue His ministry on earth.

8. The Christian Church excludes unrepentant sinners from congregations in the spirit of Law and Gospel. God's Word must not be treated with contempt by people. His truth is valid at all times in all places. Yet the Body of Christ acts in love and concern when it excommunicates unrepentant sinners. The goal is always to lead the person to repentance and faith. Excommunication also prevents unrepentant sinners from leading others into sin or unbelief.

9. God's desire and goal is that all repent and come to the knowledge of salvation in Christ through faith (1 Timothy 2:3–4).

God's Word

Invite a participant to read aloud this portion from Holy Scripture. Use the questions for reflection and discussion on the text.

10. The pastoral ministry is a Word and Sacrament ministry. Pastors preach, teach, and read God's Word in public worship. They study the Word and counsel with the Word. Their ministry revolves around the Gospel, and the various tasks of the ministry all seek to speak Law and Gospel to God's people and to the world. Encourage participants to reflect on Paul's words to Timothy.

11. Answers will vary. Because all people live with sin, we sometimes reject God's Word or seek to find or make our own salvation. Encourage participants to share their answers.

12. Accept participant responses.

God's People Pray

Use the prayer as a closing devotion. If you wish, include special prayers for needs of participants, your congregation, your community, the nation or world.

A Verse a Day

Encourage participants to read and memorize the Bible verse for each day.

5

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

Pray Together

Use the prayer as you begin the session.

Discover

Read aloud the session theme.

Introduction

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, the brief introduction to the session.

- Answers will vary.
- Answers will vary. Encourage participant discussion.

The Catechism

Read the questions and explanations from the Small Catechism. Read aloud, or invite a volunteer to read aloud, the paragraphs and questions on the Lord's Supper. Invite participants to share their responses.

1. The night of Jesus' betrayal is a somber night. Jesus knows He will soon be arrested, tried, beaten, condemned, and crucified. The first Lord's Supper, then, is a holy night and meal, for it is Jesus' final night and meal—His "last will and testament."

2. God's people remember Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, that is, all His saving work for us. To remember is not simply a

passing reminiscence about an event that happened long ago; it is, rather, an active recalling, retelling, and participation in the event—the Lord’s Supper.

3. Answers will vary. Accept participant responses.

God’s Word

Invite a participant to read aloud this portion from Holy Scripture. Use the questions for reflection and discussion on the text.

4. The Passover meal is a community meal because families are to eat together and the whole community is to eat the Passover on the same day and in the same way.

5. The first Passover meal was eaten in anticipation of the exodus from slavery in Egypt, and after the event, it was eaten in commemoration of the exodus. In a similar way, the Lord’s Supper anticipated the sacrifice of Christ on the cross on Good Friday and now looks back to remember and celebrate in repentant joy the sacrifice on Good Friday.

6. Accept participant responses. As the blood of the lamb turned away the angel of death, so the blood of the Lamb of God turns away God’s wrath as well as the destructive powers of sin, death, and Satan. Allow participants to explore the different ways the Passover meal foreshadows and points to the sacrifice of Christ for our salvation.

The Catechism

Invite a participant to read the question and explanation from Luther’s Small Catechism. Allow participants to reflect on and answer the questions.

7. Accept participant responses. God’s people come together at a set time (Sunday morning, Saturday evening) to hear His Word and receive the Lord’s Supper. They eat together, often around the table (altar) or at the communion rail, and leave with joy and peace in their hearts. But the Lord’s Supper is, of course, more than mere eating and drinking; it is participation in the Lord’s body and blood for our forgiveness. Encourage participants to explore the connections between family meals and the Lord’s Supper as the meal for God’s family.

8. The Lord’s Supper demonstrates our union with Christ through faith, but it also demonstrates our unity as His Body in the world. With His Meal, He nourishes us to live in peace with one another and with all people. A traditional prayer after the Lord’s Supper requests that God would “strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another” (LSB 183). In Christ, God’s people are united to serve the Savior.

9. Christ has given His Supper to forgive our sins, strengthen our faith, and equip us for life as His disciples. He wants us to come regularly to His table to receive His gifts and blessings.

God's Word

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, this portion of Holy Scripture. Then answer the questions and share your answers together.

10. Accept participant responses. The Emmaus disciples were journeying home after the crucifixion of their Lord. They had heard reports of Christ's resurrection but still had fears and doubts. When Jesus revealed Himself in the meal, the disciples then knew without a doubt that Christ the crucified was risen from the dead. In the same way, believers journey through life with fears and doubts, but Christ comes to us with His grace and assurance in His Holy Meal.

11. St. Luke reports that the Lord Jesus "took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them" (Luke 24:30). The allusion to the Lord's Supper is unmistakable (see Luke 22:19). Although the Emmaus disciples may not have been at the Maundy Thursday meal, they would have heard about it from the apostles and would likely have recalled Jesus' feeding the crowds as a foreshadowing of the Lord's Supper.

12. Accept participant responses.

God's People Pray

Use the prayer as a closing devotion. If you wish, include special prayers for needs of participants, your congregation, your community, the nation, and the world.

A Verse a Day

Encourage participants to read and memorize the Bible verse for each day.

6

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

Pray Together

Use the prayer as you begin the session.

Discover

Read aloud the session theme.

Introduction

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, the brief introduction to the session.

- Answers will vary, but may include the suggestion that Einstein did not want his class to forget the fundamentals, that is, the simple truths on which life depends and around which life often revolves.
- Answers will vary. Encourage participant discussion.

The Catechism

Read the question and explanation from the Small Catechism. Read aloud, or invite a volunteer to read aloud, the paragraphs and questions on the Lord's Supper.

Invite participants to share their responses.

1. Eating and drinking are necessary for life; as we eat and drink we take in essential nutrients that sustain us and allow us to grow and mature. Eating and drinking also bring joy and content-

ment to life. The Lord's Supper is necessary for our spiritual life, to sustain us and help us to grow and mature in Christ. Encourage participants to reflect on the meaning of the Lord's Supper for our spiritual life in Christ.

2. Accept participant responses. Jesus' Word is powerful; He does what He says He will do. Jesus has the power to be present in bread and wine because He says, "This is My body . . . This is My blood." In His miracles, His teaching, His preaching, Jesus demonstrated that His Word was authoritative, life-giving, life-changing, and true.

See the comments about the reality of the nonmaterial and the spiritual mentioned in the Leaders Notes, session 2, under question 6.

Christians have wondered, How can we possibly receive "the true body and blood of Christ"? Once again, keep in mind the fact of the spiritual and nonmaterial world and the reality and power of God. Some denominations have tried to explain this mystery by making the Lord's Supper a symbol, an idea with which we can identify, but not something to be taken as literally true. Others have said that in the Lord's Supper the elements actually become the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation) and are then a new substance. Luther relied on the biblical statements and said that we truly receive the body and blood of Christ "in, with, and under bread and wine," and how this happens cannot be explained. But that does not make it untrue. God is God. Some lose faith in the Lord's Supper because they cannot understand this idea (no one can!). Christians through the centuries have argued about this instead of relying on the simple statements of Scripture and the power of God Himself.

3. Answers will vary but may include the truth that eating and drinking in the Sacrament put us in contact with simple, basic needs and experiences in life. The Lord's Supper as "food for the soul" makes perfect sense for our human existence, since food for the body is essential.

God's Word

Invite a participant to read aloud this portion from Holy Scripture. Use the questions for reflection and discussion on the text.

4. The ruler and the woman believe Jesus has the power and the desire to heal people. They believe He is compassionate, loving, concerned for human problems, but also divine. They trust that Jesus is able and willing to help in their time of need.

5. When Jesus is present, He is present with His power. During His earthly ministry Jesus did not always and fully use His divine power (in the state of humiliation). After His resurrection, though, He now fully and constantly uses His divine power to accomplish His will for His Church and the world. He is present everywhere with power and love to rule as Lord and Savior.

6. Accept participant responses.

The Catechism

Invite a participant to read the question and explanation. Allow participants to reflect on and answer the questions.

7. Answers may vary but may include feelings of inadequacy, shame over sin or problems, etc. Accept participant responses.

8. Faith in Christ's Word alone makes us worthy to receive His body and blood.

9. Persons with a weak faith should be encouraged to attend the Lord's Supper regularly in order to receive Christ's forgiveness and His healing, strengthening grace.

God's Word

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, this portion of Holy Scripture. Then answer the questions and share your answers together.

10. God's people should examine themselves to be truly prepared and worthy, that is, to repent of their sins and trust Christ's gracious promise and invitation.

11. Christ welcomes to His table everyone who is truly worthy; the Church desires to see all repentant, believing persons receive the blessings of the Lord's Supper. Yet it is important for the Church to withhold the Sacrament from those who are unworthy, because they too receive the Lord's body and blood, but to their judgment (see 1 Corinthians 11:29). Those who should not be given the Sacrament are persons who are openly ungodly and unrepentant (including those who take part in non-Christian religious worship); those who are unforgiving, refusing to be reconciled; those of a different confession of faith, since the Lord's Supper is a testimony of the unity of faith; those who are unable to examine

themselves, such as infants, people who have not received proper instruction, or the unconscious (*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, pp. 240–41).

12. Answers will vary.

God's People Pray

Use the prayer as a closing devotion. If you wish, include special prayers for needs of participants, your congregation, your community, the nation, and the world.

A Verse a Day

Encourage participants to read and memorize the Bible verse for each day.