

Laetare ~ Fourth Sunday in Lent

There is a twofold eating of Christ's flesh. One is spiritual, which Christ describes especially in John 6:54. This "eating" happens in no other way than with the Spirit and faith, in preaching and meditation on the Gospel, as well as in the Lord's Supper. By itself this is useful and helpful, and necessary for all Christians, at all times, for salvation. Without this spiritual participation the sacramental or oral eating in the Supper is not only not helpful, but is even harmful and damning.

This spiritual eating is nothing other than faith. It means to hear God's Word (in which Christ, true God and man, is presented to us, together with all benefits that He has purchased for us by His flesh given into death for us, and by His blood shed for us, namely, God's grace, the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal life). It means to receive it with faith and keep it for ourselves. It means that in all troubles and temptations we firmly rely—with sure confidence and trust—and abide in this consolation: we have a gracious God and eternal salvation because of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The other eating of Christ's body is oral or sacramental, when Christ's true, essential body and blood are orally received and partaken of in the Holy Supper by all who eat and drink the consecrated bread and wine in the Supper. This is done by the believing as a certain pledge and assurance that their sins are surely forgiven them and that Christ dwells in them and is at work in them. This supper is received by the unbelieving for their judgment and condemnation. The words of the institution by Christ clearly declare this. At the table and during the Supper He offers His disciples natural bread and natural wine, which He calls His true body and true blood. At the same time He says, "Eat" and "drink." In view of the circumstances, this command clearly cannot be understood as anything other than oral eating and drinking. However, this is not in a crude, carnal, Capernaïtic way, but in a supernatural way, beyond understanding. Afterward, the other command adds still another spiritual eating, when the Lord Christ says further, "This do in remembrance of Me." He requires faith.

Solid Declaration vii.61-65; Concordia: *The Lutheran Confessions: A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

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