

The Divine Service: The Words of Our Lord

1st C.

Matthew 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–25

☐ 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.”

Now to the heart of the matter: those absolutely indispensable Words (*Verba* in Latin) by which our Lord gives us his Supper: his true body and his true blood, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and drink, for the forgiveness of our sins. The Lutheran Reformation radically simplified the surrounding pieces of the Mass, built up gradually over centuries, to let these words ring out again clearly and distinctly, as they are what matter most. The Lord's Supper is not some grand human work or offering; rather, by these words, God gives the gift of this Sacrament to his Church, for the forgiveness of sins. From these words the Catechism draws everything it so clearly teaches about the Lord's Supper (look it up if you don't remember everything it says!), because it's only in the words of our Lord that give the Supper that we can know for sure what it is.

The pastor chants (an ancient custom from a more musical and less amplified age) or speaks the *verba* clearly and distinctly. These words are meant to *consecrate* the bread and wine to be the body and blood of Jesus, for the forgiveness of sins. They are to be pronounced at every celebration of the Supper because our Lord said, “This do.” The precise words spoken are an amalgamation of the accounts of Matt 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–20; and 1 Cor 11:23–25, each of which emphasizes particular aspects of the words, but all of which are substantially the same. The words are not meant only to consecrate the elements but also to proclaim to the faithful assembled what it is they are about to receive (1 Cor 11:26) so that they may receive it in faith.

Certain actions traditionally accompany the saying of our Lord's Words. At the words, “This is my body” and “This cup is the New Testament in my blood” the pastor makes the sign of the cross over the elements being consecrated (set aside for the Lord's purpose). He then may, in ancient custom, elevate the host and the cup and genuflect (kneel) before them. This is to depict visually and physically a proper reverence for the great condescension of our Lord, that he comes to us himself, body and blood, through these humble means, for the forgiveness of our sins. These actions remind us that these are no more mere bread and wine, but “in, with, and under the bread and the wine” the true body and blood of Jesus.

Of course our Lord does not come in these things simply to be adored or worshipped, but to be eaten and drunk, for you, for the forgiveness of your sins. Therefore the liturgy moves quickly on, through the contemplation of what is to be received here in the Pax Domini and the Agnus Dei, to the distribution of the Supper.