

How different it would be for us who are Christians had Jesus taken, not bread, but meat and given it to His disciples in the upper room. These are both there on the table for the Passover meal. There is bread, the unleavened bread. And there is the lamb, the Passover lamb. Had Jesus picked up the lamb's flesh and given this to His disciples saying, "*Take and eat, this is My body,*" we would have meat and wine on the altar rather than bread and wine.

I suppose that would have magnified the meaning of just what we are taking and eating in the Sacrament – the true Passover Lamb. But we would lose the meaning which the Apostle brings out in our First Corinthians text: "*Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*"

We are one body, the body of Christ. And this is worth considering for it is truly remarkable and wonderful. There in the upper room on that Holy Thursday the disciples are all one body. But if ever there was a body that was weak, sickly, and dying, this was it.

Judas, of course, is cutting himself off from the body. He is intent on betraying Jesus, and there is no repentance in his heart. Yet even apart from Judas, the body is not much to look at. They all doubt themselves. They doubt their place in the body. When Jesus tells them, "*One of you will betray Me,*" they say to Him, one after another, "*Is it I?*" Don't they know? Are they incapable of searching their own hearts to discover if the sin of betrayal is lurking there? But then when Jesus tells them they will all fall away from Him, one after another they all deny it.

But they do fall. They all fall away. They walk, more like run away from Jesus in Gethsemane. What a mess! If they are the body of Christ, and they are, they are a body much in need of life support.

And this is exactly what Jesus does for them. He gives them the nourishing food of His flesh and blood. Ordinary food will not help them. They need food that is extra-ordinary. The food that only Jesus can give.

And so do we. We are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. And the body that we are is not very different from what we see in the upper room. We are not the picture of health. We are a body of sinners. And how have we sinned? In ways that are shocking, disturbing, and quite revealing. Maybe we are not betrayers like Judas, or maybe we are, but like the eleven other disciples, we have all walked, yes run away from Jesus to our own ways. We have failed Him. And we have no one but ourselves to blame. If we are a body, one body, then we, too, like the Twelve in the upper room, are a weak, sickly, and dying body.

But that does not negate this wonderful truth, that we are the body of Christ, for we are baptized into His death and resurrection. And we are gathered here tonight around our Lord as they were in the upper room. And Jesus will not walk away from us. He nourishes us with the life support of His Sacrament. He feeds us extra-ordinary food. The food of His own body and blood.

Back in the upper room, in those days the meal would begin with the prayer of thanksgiving and the breaking of the bread. And this is how Jesus and His disciples began the Passover meal. But then St. Mark tells us that Jesus takes the bread, says a blessing, and proceeds to break this bread. “*Take,*” He says to His disciples, “*This is My body.*” He takes the cup and gives this to His disciples. “*This is My blood of the covenant,*” He says.

Do you see what is happening here? After the meal is finished, a new meal begins. Jesus begins this new meal with the blessing and the breaking of the bread. The old meal, the old covenant, has come to an end. The new meal of His body and blood, the new covenant has begun. And with this new meal there is the forgiveness of sins.

My friends, let us not be ashamed to admit that you and I are weak, sickly, and dying; that we are sinners of the worst kind – sinners who, so often, have turned away from Jesus to follow our sinful way of life. We need to confess this truth, and we can, for here before you is the new meal. The meal of Jesus’ body and blood. The meal of forgiveness, forgiveness for you.

Your life begins anew tonight. For in the breaking of this bread we are reminded of Jesus’ broken body on the cross. He became weak, and sickly, and became the dying one. All for you, my friend, all for you.

Your past sins are all forgiven. It matters not how shocking and disturbing your past has been. That past is no more. Jesus takes it from you and He forgives you, and your life begins anew because He is your life and your salvation.

We are one body, Jesus’ body. Sinful, but forgiven. There is no one here who is not a part of this body. No matter where you have been, no matter what you have done, you are the one body of Christ. He feeds you. He nourishes you. He forgives you. Amen.