LD 29; Matthew 26:26-29; I Cor. 10:1-5; The Presence of Jesus at the Supper I. The Nature of the Sign II. The Nature of His Presence III. The Nature of our Worship

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, signs are a common part of our daily experience. We read signs telling us how fast to go and where to turn when driving. We also find signs that welcome or warn. Some signs say “do not enter or “danger” while other signs say “Main Entrance.” Signs give us instruction- and that instruction is ignored to your own peril. If the sign says- “use other door” you will try to enter without gaining access. Or if the sign reads “Push” and you continue to “Pull” you will end up looking pretty silly. In a similar way, the Lord’s Supper is a sign that is designed to be read properly. It takes wisdom and discernment to understand and gain access. So today as we return to the Lord’s Supper in the catechism, we find that this meal is a sign and symbol of sacred truth. But the sign must be read and understood properly. So we consider this theme; Jesus Christ reveals His presence for our blessing at the Lord’s Supper.

**I. The Nature of the Sign**

In our first point, we consider the nature of the sign in the Lord’s Supper. If the sacrament is meant to be seen- if these elements are meant to be visible- what is purpose and limitation of that sign. At issue is this- in our reading from Matthew 26:26 we read these words of Jesus- take and eat, for this is my body. And further on in v. 28- drink of it all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant. So Jesus says- the bread is his body and the wine is his blood. What are we to think of this- what did the disciples think of this statement? Well, the disciples understood the purpose of this statement- the words that Jesus spoke were a sacramental picture. Jesus here stated in Mt. 26 that the bread was his body- but Jesus had not yet had his body broken on the cross. Added to this, this wine was his blood but the blood of Jesus had not yet been shed. So it is that the disciples did not believe that they were literally eating and drinking Jesus. No one believes that Jesus ate his own body or drank his own blood at this first Lord’s Supper meal. No, the bread and wine remained that- bread and wine. As an aside, historically the Roman Empire accused Christians of being cannibals. It was stated that Christians were celebrating the eating of human flesh at the Lord’s Supper which was a false accusation. But the church has always been clear here- the Lord’s Supper is a picture and sign- not a literal or physical eating of Jesus. This is due to the fact that the Lords Supper is a sacrament- a sign. Signs do not replace reality- but rather they point to it. A sign that reads- “Chicago- 100 miles” - does not replace the city of Chicago! The sign is not reality. Our QA 78 clarifies this point- the bread and wine do not become the real/ physical body and blood of Jesu. The nature of a sign is this- to be a sign. To remain a picture. The sacrament does not change or transform into the reality. For example, if you have picture of your family in your phone, you know that your family is not captured and stuck in the phone. No- a picture remains just that- a picture. QA 78 reminds us that the water of baptism is not transformed into the blood of Jesus nor does the water itself wash away sins. So it is that bread and wine are not transformed into the body and blood of Jesus- and these elements do not in themselves feed our souls. So the LS is an illustration. Like a metaphor if you will. Jesus says of himself that he is the gate- or that he is the good shepherd. Or that He is the way, the truth and life. As a metaphor, the picture points to a deeper reality. So we need to understand the nature and language of the sacraments in order to better receive the fruit of the sacrament as QA 78 concludes by saying.

**II. The Nature of His Presence**

So if the bread and wine are not transformed or changed into the body and blood of Jesus, does that mean that Jesus is not present at the Lord’s Supper? Is Jesus like a benevolent king who sends gifts from afar while remaining distant? Is the Lord’s Supper a note from Jesus saying “wish I could be there?” Or is Jesus really and truly with us? Consider a few of these promises that Jesus gave to His disciples- Matthew 18:20- where 2 or 3 disciples are gathered in my name, there I am with them. Heb. 13:5- I will never leave you or forsake you. Matthew 28:20- Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Jesus promised to remain and abide with us- that He would never leave us as orphans. So which is it? Is Jesus present with us or is he not present with us? If the LS is not the literal, physical body and blood of Jesus- is he really with us? Is the presence of Jesus more than him simply being with us in thought? This is a really important point. Is Jesus with the church- does He walk among the church today or not? If He is with us, how is He present? To be clear, Jesus is not now physically present on earth. We find this clearly answered in QA 47. Jesus is fully God and fully man. His humanity is not now with us because He is physically present at the Father’s right hand in glory. But Jesus is always with us by way of His deity. By way of His divine presence, He is never absent. Or we could say that Jesus is spiritually present. Now here we have to be clear- it is common for people to say that if I cannot be with you in body I will be with you in spirit. By this, people mean that we cannot come to your event but we will be thinking about you. Is that all that Jesus does? Is that all that Jesus means- that He is thinking about us? Now it is true that Jesus is thinking about us- but when He says that He will be with us in spirit He is more than just thinking about us from afar! He is by way of His deity- as God is spirt- he is really and truly present! We read of this spiritual presence in our reading from I Cor. 10:3-4; all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink from the spiritual rock. Christ in his spiritual form- or in His spiritual presence remained with the Israelites in the wilderness. And it is this spiritual presence that we enjoy today. Although it is true that God is spirit and he is present everywhere- omnipresent if you. We are promised that there is an added focus and increased measure of His presence in the church and witnessed in the sacrament! So Jesus is really and truly here- present in his spirit. And since this is the case, we have the added assurance that the Lord’s Supper is a means of grace! To be clear, the LS is more than just a metaphor! Not just a sign- but also a seal! The Holy Spirit really does do something- a change really does take place. As QA 79 clarifies, the change that takes place in the LS is not a change in the element but a change in me! The transformation is not Jesus coming down to earth in the flesh and taking on the form of the bread and wine, but rather my heart is transformed to love Jesus more and my life is transformed to look more like him! So I am changed- as I partake of this meal with a heart of faith- I know that the HS is making me new- making me more like Christ- weaving my heart to His people! So I really am sharing in Christ’s work- partaking of His sacrifice- as I am lifted up to glory in my soul to eat and drink of Christ!

**III. The Nature of our Worship**

Now that we understand the nature of Christ’s presence, what remains is the worship that rightly flows from this presence. In other words, your understanding of where Jesus is present will determine where you direct your praise! If Jesus is on earth in these elements, then your focus and worship will be directed to the elements where Jesus is to be found. What we confess and believe about the Lord’s Supper has a direct consequence on how we worship! So what do others confess and believe concerning this doctrine? Well, in QA 80 you will find a summary of the Roman Catholic teaching of Transubstantiation. Basically, the Roman Church teaches that when the priest says the specific words, the elements of bread and wine are changed or transformed into the body and blood of Jesus. This body of Jesus is again broken and his blood poured out which means that they are continuing the sacrifice of Jesus. This sacrifice needs to be repeated and offered daily in order for sins to be forgiven. So if, in their view, the bread becomes the body and the wine becomes the blood, Jesus is to be found in the elements themselves. That is why it is standard practice to kneel before the elements and revere the bread and wine. Instead of a table for the supper, there is an alter for their sacrifice. It is this worship of the elements- the revering of the wine and bread that is taken up in QA 80. You see- wherever Jesus is- that is where you direct your worship. If Jesus is in the elements, the elements will be worshipped. But is Jesus to be found in the elements? The other extreme to the view of Jesus’ presence is that of Memorialism. Following in the line of Zwingli, many present-day Baptist and Anabaptist do not see Jesus as being present in any way at the Lord’s Supper. This meal is only in remembrance- only a reminder. We are to commemorate and remember- that’s it. But is that it- only a remembrance? No! Remember that the Lord’s Supper is a means of grace! It is meal that we share with Christ and His people where Christ is with us! We celebrate Christ’s one sacrifice- but the benefits are continuing to be enjoyed! The Reformed view of Christ’s presence is that He is really, truly and spiritually present! But He remains physically in heaven where He is to be worshipped and adored. In other words, we direct our worship to heaven as we look for real benefit on earth! We, by the working of the Holy Spirit, really do expect to grow in grace, peace and holiness! We do look for our love to grow- as we are sanctified in His image! Yes, He is and remains in glory! But His gifts, grace and His Spirit have been sent to us- poured out upon us- so that we really do benefit as we eat and partake with a heart of faith!

To conclude, the Lord’s Supper is a sign that points to a reality- Jesus really did die, He really did rise and He really is seated at His Father’s right hand! Just as we really see, eat and drink, we really do grow in our souls as we partake by faith! Jesus Christ reveals His presence for our blessing at the Lord’s Supper. So when we come, let us come with joy as we direct our worship to the Son who sits on high- as we eat true, spiritual food and drink; being nourished unto eternal life!