

New Apostolic Church

Divine Service Guide

1 March
God helps

4/5 March
Spiritual treasures

8 March
Receiving help and giving thanks

11/12 March
Conscientious following

15 March
God's word remains

18/19 March
Resisting evil

22 March
Serving like Jesus

25/26 March
Food for eternal life

29 March
Fellowship with the Lord

Youth service
A new start

A monthly publication
for the ministers
March 2020

3

Foreword

The divine service for the departed on the first Sunday of March revolves around the comforting thought that God desires to liberate both the living and the dead from the reign of the evil one, and lead them into fellowship with Himself. In order to attain this, the living and dead alike must align themselves with the will of God. Our task is to profess Jesus Christ and to intercede in prayer for the departed.

The sermons of the two ensuing Sunday services deal with the question of how the gospel can be put into practice.

The theme of the divine service on the second Sunday of the month centres on the help of God and our gratitude towards Him. Our gratitude also comes to expression in that we trust in God and follow Jesus Christ.

On the third Sunday of March, the sermon centres on the power of the word of God. The word of God causes us to become His witnesses, who proclaim the gospel in both word and deed. Even under difficult conditions, God sees to it that His word produces something: it is an effective power!

On the fourth Sunday of the month, we commemorate an important step in the passion of Jesus Christ. In the washing of the feet, Jesus gives His disciples an example of serving. Particularly in His last hours, Jesus would have had grounds to allow others to encourage and strengthen Him, but He served until the very end! Serving consistently and with dedication, in humbleness and without any expectation of acknowledgement, allows us to share in Jesus.

In the last Sunday service of the month, the focus is on Holy Communion, which Jesus instituted before His suffering and death. Partaking worthily of Holy Communion establishes our fellowship of life with Christ. No one can earn the right to share in this fellowship through good works. That which has been granted to us by God in Holy Baptism and Holy Sealing is strengthened and preserved by Holy Communion. This serves to our preparation for the return of Christ.

Divine service for the departed

God helps

The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them.
Psalm 145:18–19

Message

God grants salvation to those who fear Him.

Introduction

Statisticians estimate that more than 160,000 people die every day. But no one can estimate the number of those who suffer around the globe. No one can measure or estimate the degree of physical and mental suffering that exists among human beings.

Suffering and misfortune lead many people here on earth to ask the question: "So where is God anyway?" It is not our task to answer this question. No one can give a plausible explanation for all the suffering that afflicts humanity. The answers that are often given are unsatisfactory.

God brings salvation

The actions of God are often far beyond human comprehension. God, Himself, can only be grasped in faith. In order to attain salvation, human beings must go without the need for an answer to all their questions. Modesty is necessary here. The fear of God is a prerequisite for attaining salvation.

The help that we can offer other human beings consists of making them aware of the salvation that God offers them and pointing out the way that leads there. God desires to liberate them from the rule of the evil one in order to lead them into fellowship with Himself. It was for this reason that God the Son became man.

Our task

Our task is to profess Jesus Christ. We are certain that eternal fellowship with God is such a great treasure that it surpasses even the most terrible suffering and the greatest injustice. We bring this conviction to expression in our faithfulness to Christ, as well as in the desire to already partake in fellowship with Him today. This is also shown in our intercession for the departed. We pray to God to have compassion on them because fellowship with God is the only means to overcome suffering and misery.

Accepting salvation

In order to attain salvation, both the living and the dead must

- believe in the incarnation, sacrifice, and resurrection of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.
- accept the will of Jesus Christ and align themselves by Him. His word is

the truth, which liberates human beings from the lies of the devil *(John 8:31–32, 44)*.

- demonstrate remorse, ask for forgiveness for their sins, and have the desire to forgive others.
- receive Holy Baptism with water in order to be liberated from original sin.
- receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in order to become a new creation in Christ.
- receive Holy Communion in order to strengthen the divine life within themselves, and prepare themselves for the resurrection at the return of Christ.

Let us pray that the departed may recognise their sinfulness, feel the desire for salvation, and recognise and accept the authority of the apostolate, which dispenses the sacraments.

Thoughts from the Chief Apostle

Summary

- God desires to liberate both the living and the dead from the rule of the evil one.
- Our task is to profess Jesus Christ.
- We bring this conviction to expression through our faithfulness to Christ.
- We ask God to have compassion upon the departed.

The departed must align themselves by the will of God, regret their sins, and accept the sacraments.

Context

Psalm 145 is an example of acrostic poetry. The first line of the psalm begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the second with the second letter, and so forth. The theme is that God is King over the whole world and that all honour and glory is due Him alone.

After the introduction *(verses 1–2)*, the psalm makes five theological statements, namely that God is great *(verses 3–6)*, that God is kind and good *(verses 7–10)*, that God rules His kingdom *(verses 11–13)*, that God cares for mankind *(verses 14–17)*, and that God is near *(verses 18–21)*. *Verse 21* serves as a concluding expression of praise.

Spiritual treasures

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.
Luke 6:45

Message

Our speech attests to our spiritual wealth.

Introduction

God has planted new life within us through the rebirth out of water and the Spirit. If we allow this life to grow within us, we will become richer and richer in Christ. This spiritual wealth is then reflected in our words. Let us take a closer look at some of the spiritual treasures that God has bestowed upon us.

The knowledge of Christ

Through the testimony of the Holy Spirit, we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He has conquered Hades and death, that He has resurrected, and that He will come again in order to take His own unto Himself. This recognition of Jesus Christ awakens praise and trust in God within us, even in the midst of the greatest afflictions and distresses. Take Paul and Silas, for example. Imprisoned—after having been sorely beaten—they praised God despite their stripes and chains *(Acts 16:22–34)*.

Reverence before God

In accordance with the example of the leprous Samaritan *(Luke 17:15–16)*, we acknowledge the help of God and give thanks to Him. Filled with reverence for God, we take His word seriously. Instead of thinking that His word is meant for our neighbour, we ask—as the disciples did—"Lord, is it I?" *(Matthew 26:22)*.

Being joint-heirs with Christ

The letter to the Romans states: "And if [we are] children, then [we are] heirs—heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. If indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" *(Romans 8:17)*. Paul refers to the fact that Christians will first need to suffer before glory can be bestowed upon them. Following also entails pursuing the path of Christ and accepting suffering. Then we will also receive the inheritance from Him, namely the resurrection body and fellowship with God. Let us strive for this.

The promise of Jesus' return

In the hope in the imminent return of Christ, we encourage one another: "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry" *(Hebrews 10:37)*. Even if we do not constantly bring this

to expression, our plans for the future nevertheless always incorporate the return of the Lord.

Love for our neighbour

God has poured out His love in our hearts *(Romans 5:5)*. This love allows us to understand those who do evil to us as prisoners of the evil one, and not as our enemies. Instead of repaying evil with evil, we ask God to liberate such individuals from the evil one *(1 Corinthians 4:11–13)*.

Belonging to Jesus Christ

In the court of the high priest, a servant girl recognised Peter as one of Jesus' disciples because he spoke the same language *(Matthew 26:73)*. Does the way we express ourselves always allow others to recognise that we belong to Jesus Christ and that we are His followers and joint-heirs with Him?

Thoughts from the Chief Apostle

Summary

Our spiritual wealth shows itself in that we

- recognise Christ, praise Him, and trust in Him.
- are filled with reverence toward God, and take His word seriously.
- pursue the path of Christ and take suffering upon ourselves. Then we will also receive the inheritance with Him.
- always incorporate the imminent return of the Lord in our plans for life.
- reflect the love of God in our attitude toward our neighbour.

Context

After beginning His activity in Galilee, particularly in Nazareth and Capernaum *(Luke 4)*, Jesus turns to the land of the Jews in order to preach the coming kingdom of God *(Luke 5:1–6:49)*. Jesus visits different places to preach, to heal, and to dispute with the Pharisees and scribes. Our Bible word is taken from the Sermon on the Plain *(Luke 6:17–49)*, which bears certain similarities to the Sermon on the Mount.

Receiving help and giving thanks

So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?"
Luke 17:17–18

Message

We are grateful for God's support and help!

Introduction

We are aware that suffering is part of human life. But just as Jesus experienced help even in the bitterest suffering, those who trust in God can always hope in His help *(Psalm 42:5)*.

Miracles of Jesus

Especially at the beginning of His public activity, Jesus demonstrated His divine authority and power by way of miracles. Nevertheless, very few people were won over to His message of love and following by such miracles. Many people of His time were more concerned about leading a better life than about the salvation of their souls. This became very clear after the miracle of the feeding of the multitude *(John 6:26–27)* when Jesus observed that the people did not return because of Him and His activity of salvation, but quite simply because their hunger was satisfied there.

The healing of the lepers

People who suffered from leprosy were considered unclean and were thus excluded from human society *(Leviticus 13–14)*. These drastic penalties were not only imposed for religious reasons but also in order to reduce the risk of infection for others. People afflicted with leprosy were excluded from the local community and prohibited from participating in religious acts, meaning social marginalisation and additional burdens for them.

The ten lepers healed by Jesus would, therefore, have had all sorts of reasons to show gratitude to their benefactor now that they had been permitted to return to a normal life! Yet once their earthly situation of need had been resolved, they forgot something that was actually quite self-evident, namely to give thanks! Was this a consequence of their egocentricity?

Salvation through Christ

Just as leprosy isolated human beings from their community, sin leads to separation from God. Only the sacrifice of Jesus can offer help for this situation!

The fact that a foreigner—namely a Samaritan—was the only one to come back and give thanks can be seen as a

reference that it was not only the Jews who were to experience salvation through Christ, but rather people of all nations and all time periods.

Apostle Paul also testifies eloquently to this fact. After having recognised the Risen One, this man, who had originally persecuted the Christians, praised the immeasurable grace of God and demonstrated his gratitude through his unshakable following, not least of all through suffering *(2 Corinthians 1:5; 2 Timothy 4:7)*!

Even in times of need, let us recognise with gratitude that

- Jesus did not come to this earth to improve the world, but rather as our Saviour and Redeemer—and that He will soon come again in order to take unto Himself those who have prepared for His coming!
- He has conquered sin through His sacrificial death and thereby made eternal fellowship with God accessible to mankind.

Summary

Need and deprivation are part of life. In Christ, we receive eternal life.

- Through His unique sacrifice, He has conquered sin and suspended the separation that exists between sinners and God.
- He will come again in order to take unto Himself those who have prepared for His coming.
- We trust in Him and follow Him out of gratitude!

Context

Ten leprous men implore Jesus to heal them. The men follow His instructions and are healed. However, of these ten men, only one—a Samaritan, a foreigner—kneels before Him and gives thanks to Him. This was the highest form of gratitude and deference a person could show at the time.

Notes

Conscientious following

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.
Matthew 19:29

Message

Eternal life with God more than makes up for all the hardships and deprivations we must endure for the sake of the gospel.

Introduction

With the prospect of eternal life, Jesus shows us an incomparable reward for following. The prerequisite for this is conscientious action on our part.

Those who desire to follow Christ in order to share in His merit and enter into eternal fellowship with Him may find themselves in situations that demand conscientious decisions.

Jesus illustrates this reality with the image of leaving houses, loved ones, or possessions.

Leaving …

- … houses

We feel at ease in our house. It is our comfort zone, which we must at times leave in order to practise our Christian faith conscientiously. As a member of the high council, Joseph of Arimathea dared to take the step of publicly professing Jesus despite the great risk to his position in society *(Mark 15:43; John 19:38)*.

- … people who are dear to us

Even today, there are regions of the world in which professing Jesus Christ results in people being ostracised from their family. Accepting the gospel can, therefore, lead a person to turn away from even his closest relatives *(Luke 12:53)*. This makes diligent following particularly arduous. It is imperative that we intercede in prayer for such sisters and brothers.

- … possessions

Jesus suggests that we re-evaluate our relationship to material possessions. He did not speak ill of the rich young man's possessions *(Matthew 19:21)*. However, the reaction of the young man showed how much more important his wealth was to him than the prospect of eternal life, which Jesus had offered him.

Human conceptions of reward

When we look back upon all the things we have managed to do up until now in the scope of our conscientious following and consider all the deprivations we have endured

as a result, the thought may arise that such an accomplishment deserves a special reward *(Matthew 19:27; Mark 10:37–40)*. Jesus responds to this by stating that no one can assume he is one of the first. The important thing is to humbly take care that we do not become one of the last *(Matthew 19:30)*.

Jesus as an example of conscientious action

Jesus

- saw through the enticing offers of Satan, and consistently rejected the earthly advantages associated with them *(Matthew 4:1–11)*.
- walked the difficult path to Jerusalem, knowing that Satan would let loose on Him there with all his might.

The promised reward

The hundredfold reward that Jesus promises those who find their way to following Him—be it already today, during the great tribulation, or in the kingdom of peace—is an image for the goodness and kindness of God. Eternal fellowship with Him in the new creation will be so great that no one will even think about the dreadful experiences or sufferings one may have endured *(Isaiah 65:17–18; Revelation 21:3–4)*.

Summary

As we follow Christ, it will be necessary

- to leave our comfort zone from time to time.
- not to forget those who are persecuted for professing Jesus Christ, and to intercede for them in prayer.
- to re-evaluate the priority of our material possessions.

Jesus is our example in acting conscientiously and not allowing Himself to be distracted or frightened.

Context

Following the conversation between Jesus and the rich young man, Peter inquires with the Lord about the reward for following. Jesus does not deny that His followers will have to endure deprivations in this life, but He does give them the prospect of a reward that will cause them to forget all their sufferings.

Notes

God's word remains

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.
Isaiah 55:10–11

Message

We remain steadfast in serving the Lord and preparing ourselves for His return.

Introduction

During their exile in Babylon, the chosen people waited for God's help. In this time of hopelessness, God sent them His prophet in order to assure the exiles that He had not forgotten them: "'For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,'" says the Lord, who has mercy on you" *(Isaiah 54:10)*. He also explained to them that God's actions far surpass human understanding *(Isaiah 55:8–9)*. Then the prophet referred to the example of the water cycle in order to remind them of a fundamental truth: God is faithful. There is no difference between His word and His deeds. The word of God is more than mere consolation: it produces something. It is an effective power!

God's Word became flesh

When we read this passage from the book of Isaiah, we are reminded of Jesus Christ. He came to this earth in order to proclaim the word of the Lord *(John 1:14)*. From a human perspective, His mission was a failure. Rejected by the people, He died like a criminal on the cross. But this "defeat" of Jesus was only a perceived defeat. Through His sacrifice, He conquered Hades and death. He was able to return to the Father after having fulfilled His mission perfectly. The Word did not return to the Father without effect!

The proclamation of the word

Jesus sent His Apostles into the world, just as His Father had sent Him *(John 17:18)*. Their mission is to proclaim His word, dispense the sacraments, and prepare the bridal congregation for His return *(2 Corinthians 11:2)*. The Lord will be with His Apostles until they have completed their mission!

God has chosen us to be His witnesses *(1 Peter 2:9)*. Our task is to proclaim the gospel in word and deed. For everything else we trust in God: He will see to it that the word does not return to Him without fulfilling its function. It is He who will

cause the seed to germinate and grow at the right moment *(Mark 4:26–28; 1 Corinthians 3:6–7)*! The proclamation of the gospel is never in vain, even though many things have changed in the church and the world around us:

- the course of our lives is sometimes shattered by dramatic and unexpected events.
- established values are now called into question by society. The churches have lost their influence. The Christian faith seems to be on the retreat.
- the bulk of our Church's membership is in Africa, while other districts are being restructured and congregations are being closed.

Such situations are not to make us uncertain. Let us trust in God: He will fulfil His plan. None of these changes are to distract us from the essential, namely to live in accordance with the gospel, to put the old Adam to death, and to grow into the image of Christ. Let us continue to concentrate on this!

Thoughts from the Chief Apostle

Summary

- The word of God will produce something. It is an effective power!
- Jesus Christ returned to the Father after having fulfilled His task.
- God has chosen us to be His witnesses and to proclaim the gospel in word and deed.
- The proclamation of the gospel is not in vain, even though many things in the church and the world around us have changed.

Context

The *55th chapter of Isaiah* begins by offering water, milk, and wine to those who thirst. These are images of God's grace and salvation. The chapter refers to the word of God: this is what endures, even for the people who were exiled in Babylon. The word of God is like the rain and snow that fall to the ground and make it fertile. The word of God, therefore, will not return to God empty, but will rather fulfil the purpose for which it has been sent, namely to bring salvation to Israel.

Notes

Resisting evil

Having received the piece of bread, he [Judas] then went out immediately. And it was night. John 13:30

Reading: Mark 14:12–26

Message

Having been strengthened by Christ, let us resist evil.

Introduction

In all the accounts of the Passion, Judas has a role to play: he often appears as the image of unrestrained evil and cunning.

In one incident that takes place shortly before his betrayal, namely the anointing of Jesus, Judas is also mentioned in a negative context. Judas criticises this anointing with words to the effect that it would have been better to sell the oil used for the anointing and to give the proceeds to the poor. This is quite an understandable objection. However, Judas was driven by completely different motivations. He was not at all concerned about the poor. Rather, he had been embezzling the money that had been entrusted to his care *(John 12:1–6)*.

The betrayal

Judas is one of the individuals who help bring about the death of Jesus. He goes to the high priests and offers to betray Jesus, and in so doing learns how much they will pay him for this *(Matthew 26:14–16)*.

At the meal that follows the washing of the feet, Jesus says to the disciples: "One of you will betray Me" *(John 13:21)*. The disciples are quite upset and begin to inquire as to who will likely be the culprit. Then something of note occurs: "Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him [Judas]. Then Jesus said to him, 'What you do, do quickly'" *(John 13:27)*.

The betrayal of Jesus committed by Judas thus has its source in the evil one, in Satan, who enters into Judas. It seems as though it had not even been clear to Judas beforehand that he would betray the Lord.

And it was night

Thereafter we read: "Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night" *(John 13:30)*. Judas, who as an Apostle should have been a friend to Jesus, now turns against Him. He goes out into the night of unbelief and disloyalty. The darkness and loneliness of evil take hold of him.

Resisting the evil one

However, Judas still had a choice. After all, one can always choose to resist the evil one. Nowhere does the text relate that he was forced into his actions. He was the one who decided on this course. He decided to make his way into the night and darkness.

Cain was warned by God about killing his brother and was encouraged to rule over sin. Cain was envious of Abel's sacrifice, which was accepted by God. Cain became angry, lowered his eyes, and proceeded to commit his crime despite God's warning *(Genesis 4:1–9)*.

God has equipped man with a conscience, reason, and faith *(Romans 2:14–15)*. All human beings, therefore, have awareness within themselves of that which God desires of them. Thus the conscience also points out the will of God to human beings and thereby calls upon them to rule over sin *(CNAC 4.2.1.3/CNAC-QA 234–237)*.

Out of love, Jesus gave His life for His friends *(John 15:13)*. He resisted evil and conquered it for them. As His friends, we receive the powers to resist the evil one when we partake of Holy Communion.

Summary

- Judas is the image of unrestrained evil and cunning. He is one of the people who help bring about the death of Jesus.
- The betrayal of Jesus has its source in the evil one.
- Jesus resisted evil and conquered it. He grants His friends the powers they need in order to resist the evil one.

Context

In the oldest gospel, namely the gospel according to Mark, which came into being around the year AD 70, Judas is introduced with a brief note in the context of the calling of the Apostles by Jesus *(Mark 3:13 et seq.)*. At the end of the list of names, Judas Iscariot is mentioned with an additional designation, namely the words, "who also betrayed Him". In this passage, the word "betrayed" (*prodotes*) can also be translated as "handed over" or "delivered".

Matthew 27:1–10 relates Judas' end. There he is portrayed as a broken person full of inner contradictions. Another version of the death of Judas is handed down to us in *Acts 1:16–20*.

Serving like Jesus

Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."
John 13:6–8

Message

Let us have a part with Jesus, and serve just as He served.

Introduction

The thirteenth chapter of the gospel of John describes the last meal of Jesus with His disciples before the feast of Passover. During the supper, Jesus surprises His disciples by washing their feet.

It was customary to wash the feet of one's guests before eating, in order to cleanse them from the dust of the road. With the washing of the feet during the supper, Jesus was preparing His disciples for the path that lay ahead of Him: they were to be cleansed and sanctified to serve in the mind of Jesus, their Master, who abased Himself and gave His life for them.

This also meant that they would share in Jesus' sufferings and death—as well as in His resurrection.

The service of Jesus

The duty of washing feet was usually reserved for slaves. We can well understand how such an unexpected service on the part of Jesus would have caused Peter to ask questions. The dialogue between Jesus and Peter reveals the deeper meaning of the example that the Son of God gave His disciples.

- Even in His last hours, Jesus did not have others serve Him. And He certainly would have had reasons to allow others to encourage and strengthen Him—after all; He knew the path that lay ahead of Him. And yet Jesus served to the end!
- Jesus did not shy away from performing the duty of a slave, even though He was the Son of God. He was willing to perform this rather unpleasant service that was held in such low regard!
- Jesus made it clear that there was no hierarchy among His disciples. The important thing was mutual service: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" *(John 13:14)*.

- Jesus devoted Himself to the disciples in pure love. Thereby He clearly demonstrated the attitude with which disciples of Christ are to perform their service, namely in humbleness and selflessness.

Our service

Through baptism with water and the gift of the Holy Spirit, we have received a share of Jesus' life and nature. Let us, therefore, serve in the same manner in which Jesus Christ served.

- At times we think: "But now it would be time for others to serve me for a change!" As disciples of Jesus, we are steadfast servants.

- As human beings, we tend to prefer those duties and services that bring acknowledgement and reward. As true disciples of Jesus Christ, are we prepared to serve with the gifts we have received wherever we are needed? Even in secret, where no one can see us, and we cannot expect any praise?

- At times we occupy ourselves with questions of hierarchy or levels of responsibility and then wait for others to do something. As disciples of Christ, we say: "We are always prepared to serve!"

- In our service as disciples of Christ, it is always about the Lord and the perfection of His church. We are prepared to serve in humbleness and selflessness, without the need for recognition.

Such service is a credible testimony of the fact that we genuinely share in the nature of Jesus Christ.

Summary

Let us share in Jesus, and serve as He has served:

- we serve steadfastly.
- we serve wherever we are needed.
- we serve selflessly.
- we serve in humbleness.

Context

For one thing, the gospel of John portrays the washing of the feet, which is not mentioned in any of the other gospels. The meal described there is related to the Passover.

Notes

Food for eternal life

Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."
John 6:26–27

Message

Jesus grants eternal life to those who believe in Him.

Introduction

Through the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, Jesus demonstrated that He had been sent by His Father and equipped with authority ("God the Father has set His seal on Him"). At the same time, this miracle of feeding serves as a reference to the kingdom of God, in which abundance prevails.

Understanding Jesus correctly

However, the people did not understand the significance of this miracle. Some of them simply saw Jesus as the one who had come to liberate them from the yoke of the Romans. When He perceived that they wanted to make Him their king, He eluded the crowds and made His way to a mountain alone *(verse 15)*. When the people came back to Him the next day, Jesus reproached them for following Him out of the wrong motivations. Some of them had only come back in the hopes that He would again perform a miracle for them *(verses 22–25)*. Jesus responded to this expectation as follows: "Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life" *(verse 27)*.

Jesus grants eternal salvation

There are many Christians today who merely have a pragmatic faith: for them, Jesus is primarily a Deliverer from difficulties. Certainly, we can always turn to God in order to ask Him for help—and He is all too happy to grant it. The essential thing, however, is something completely different. Jesus Christ did not come in order to provide us with help that is of limited duration, but rather to liberate us once and for all from our captivity by the evil one, and to lead us into eternal fellowship with God.

Jesus did not want to be King of the Jews in any political sense. Many Christians see the gospel as a kind of ethical code which is to be imposed upon every individual. It is true that life in society would be much simpler if all

human beings were to heed the commandments of Jesus, but this would not resolve the problem at its source. Human beings would remain sinners and would not be in a position to liberate themselves from the rule of evil or attain salvation.

The kind of faith that leads to eternal life

Jesus admonished His listeners to focus on eternal life. Eternal life is granted by the Son of God. No one can earn it for himself. In order to attain it, one must

- believe in Jesus, that is, in His incarnation, His sacrifice, His resurrection, and His return.
- accept the fact that we need a Redeemer. Our good works alone will not save us.
- believe in the gospel, particularly in the need to be reborn out of water and the Spirit *(John 3:6)*, and receive Holy Communion *(John 6:53)*.
- deny oneself in order to live in Christ. This means that we must align our thoughts and actions by the example of Christ.

Thoughts from the Chief Apostle

Summary

- Jesus Christ has been sent by God and equipped with authority.
- Many people did not understand the true significance of Jesus' miracles.
- Jesus Christ did not come in order to provide help that is of limited duration, but rather to liberate us from evil and lead us into fellowship with God.
- Jesus admonishes us to focus on our eternal future.

Context

Our Bible word is taken from Jesus' bread discourse. It is preceded by the feeding of the 5,000 and the account of Jesus walking on the sea. Jesus' discourse concerning the bread of life leads to divisions among the disciples, who do not understand Jesus' message, but also to the profession of Apostle Peter, namely that Jesus is the Holy One of God. The site of the bread discourse was the synagogue in Capernaum. *Verse 26* links this discourse with the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus Himself states: "I am the bread of life" *(verse 35)*. In this manner, Jesus revealed something that had previously been hidden, namely that He is salvation! Concerning the Son of Man, please see *CNAC 3.4.6.3/CNAC–QA 114*.

Fellowship with the Lord

Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."
Luke 22:17–18

Message

Partaking worthily of Holy Communion establishes our fellowship of life with Christ.

Introduction

From the account of the institution of Holy Communion *(Luke 22:14–20)*, it is clear that the Lord celebrated this in the fellowship of His Apostles. He breaks the bread and gives it to them, and does the same with the blessed chalice of wine.

The nearness of the kingdom of God

Jesus had fellowship with the Apostles in daily life, and here He also shared table fellowship with them. As a sign of this fellowship, the Apostles pass the cup along to one another. The kingdom of God which they have experienced with the Lord can now also be near to all who partake worthily of Holy Communion, that is, to those who are willing to repent, accept the forgiveness of sins, and believe in the invisible presence of Christ in the sacrament.

The body and blood of Jesus

The broken bread is a reference to the broken body of Christ, and the wine refers to His blood, which has been shed for all human beings. The body and blood of Jesus are truly joined to these elements through the consecration: Christ is now present in the midst of the congregation as the crucified, risen, and returning Lord.

Sharing fellowship with one another

In Holy Communion, Christ first of all has fellowship with the Apostles, as well as with every believer. The believers also share this fellowship with one another. The life of Christ is thus to be experienced by all. Like the Apostles of the time, we must also pass the cup along, in other words, see to it that the salvation of Christ can be made accessible to all. Forgiving one another paves the way for this. Let us also pray that each one in the congregation may fully partake of Holy Communion.

Faith instead of merit

Faith is the only way to gain access to divine revival, be it in the sermon, the forgiveness of sins, or by receiving the sacraments. Jesus once called upon a rich man, who claimed to have kept all the commandments of God, to sell all his goods and follow Him *(Mark 10:17–22)*, in other words, to

believe in Him. It is honourable to live a devout life. It is desirable to be rich. But no one can lay claim to the fellowship of life with Jesus, no matter how good his conduct.

Equal before the Lord

Holy Communion unites! If each individual is connected with Christ, then they are also connected to one another, because in Holy Communion we all eat the same bread and drink the same wine. Despite all our differences, let us, therefore, approach others in the knowledge that the same love of Christ applies to all.

No one is excluded

Jesus clearly says that He will be betrayed by one of His own *(Luke 22:21–23)*. However, He does not exclude the betrayer from the meal of fellowship. Let us also apply the same to ourselves: if Christ did not exclude anyone from having fellowship with Him, we must not exclude anyone who is part of the congregation either!

Through the celebration of Holy Communion, we remain in the fellowship of life with Christ, our Lord. That which God has granted us in our baptism and sealing is strengthened and preserved in Holy Communion. It is therefore also an essential means of preparation for the return of Christ and for becoming a firstling.

Summary

- The kingdom of God can be near to all those who partake worthily of Holy Communion, namely those who repent and accept the forgiveness of sins and believe in the invisible presence of Christ in the sacrament.
- Let us pray that all may be able to partake worthily of Holy Communion.
- No one can enter into the fellowship of life with Jesus Christ on the basis of his good works.
- Holy Communion also serves to prepare us for the return of Christ and helps us become a firstling.

Context

We find an account of the institution of Holy Communion in *Luke 22:14–20*. This event takes place in the circle of the Apostles. Jesus foretells that an end-point has now been reached. *Verse 18* stands in parallel to the prophecy that Jesus will only eat again in the kingdom of God because the same applies to the drinking of wine. Jesus speaks these words in view of the completion of the kingdom of God, which will begin with His return.

A new start

And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.
Galatians 5:24

Message

We walk in a new life.

Introduction

Soon we will celebrate Good Friday and Easter Sunday when we will commemorate the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. These two opposing events are inseparably connected. To this day, many have difficulty comprehending that the Son of God had to allow Himself to be crucified like a criminal, especially because He could easily have prevented this in His omnipotence. But without His death, the resurrection—the victory over sin and death that stands above all things—could not have occurred.

Belonging to Christ

We have retraced this event in our Holy Baptism with water. For Paul, baptism constitutes dying with Christ and a victory over sin. From that moment on, we have walked "in newness of life" *(Romans 6:2–4)*. Our Bible word mentions that the flesh has been crucified. We have made a vow to God to renounce the evil one and to surrender ourselves completely to a new life of following Christ. With Him, the Son of God, we have been given a new start: whereas we were previously slaves of sin, we are now slaves of righteousness *(Romans 6:17–18)*. And beyond that, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" *(2 Corinthians 5:17)*. Through this change in allegiance, we now belong to Christ. He is our Lord!

Crucifying the flesh …

When Jesus spoke about His sufferings, His disciples reacted with great incomprehension *(Matthew 16:22–23)*. Jesus showed us, however, that the old must first pass so that new life can come into being.

Sin has changed the nature of human beings for all times. Their relationship with God and their neighbour is troubled. From the original recriminations we read about between Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden *(Genesis 3:12–13)*, envy, competition, enmity, and even murder have since developed.

In order to fundamentally change this reality, we must make a new start. As followers of Christ, we are called upon to crucify all of these things, in other words, to put them to death. What is meant here is that we no longer give life to these things. We no longer fall into these modes of behaviour. This is the only way we can make room for new life.

This does not happen on its own *(Luke 8:34–36)*. Following comes at a cost. Jesus did not leave any doubt about it: those who follow Him must be prepared to swim against the current of sin that seeks to sweep them away.

… with its passions and desires

Here the question might arise: is it worth it to fight for Christ and against sin? Don't the passions and desires of life make things more interesting and appealing?

Passions and desires can be an inexhaustible source of sin. And we must cause this source to dry up completely. In this endeavour, it is helpful to ask the fundamental question: "Will that which I am doing bring me closer to the Lord and my neighbour, or not?" And then we must act accordingly.

The new start

Self-flagellation or making a show of our abstinence will not help us. The new life is to fundamentally redefine us:

- we do not resign ourselves to the destructive power of sin, but rather lift our gaze to Jesus Christ, our true perspective.
- we learn that we cannot manage a victory over sin through our own strength. Christ grants us the necessary strength.
- we no longer see our neighbour as a competitor!
- we are happy whenever others can be won for Christ *(1 Corinthians 9:19–22)*.

Summary

- Our baptism constitutes death with Christ, and allows us to walk in newness of life.
- We belong to Christ and must be prepared to swim against the current of sin.
- In this endeavour, it is helpful to ask the fundamental question: "Will that which I am doing bring me closer to the Lord and my neighbour, or not?"

Context

Followers of Christ will lead corresponding lives that are characterised by moderation and a certain degree of self-control. No one can profess the crucified Jesus as the Christ without renouncing his old nature with its passions and desires, after having recognised these as sin *(verses 19–21)*.

Proposal for optional reading during the divine service: *Romans 6:3–12*

Reading for the Bible study service

Mark 14:12–26

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?" And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us." So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover.

In the evening He came with the Twelve. Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me." And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, "Is it I?" And another said, "Is it I?" He answered and said to them, "It is one of the Twelve, who dips with Me in the dish. The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born."

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Reading for the youth service

Romans 6:3–12

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.

Notes

March

1	Sun.	Psalm 145:18–19	
2	Mon.		
3	Tue.		
4	Wed.	Luke 6:45	
5	Thur		
6	Fri.		
7	Sat.		
8	Sun.	Luke 17:17–18	
9	Mon.		
10	Tue.		
11	Wed.	Matthew 19:29	
12	Thur.		
13	Fri.		
14	Sat.		
15	Sun.	Isaiah 55:10–11	
16	Mon.		
17	Tue.		
18	Wed.	John 13:30	
19	Thur.		
20	Fri.		
21	Sat.		
22	Sun.	John 13:6–8	
23	Mon.		
24	Tue.		
25	Wed.	John 6:26–27	
26	Thur.		
27	Fri.		
28	Sat.		
29	Sun.	Luke 22:17–18	
30	Mon.		
31	Tue.		

Youth service: Galatians 5:24

April

1	Wed.	Matthew 20:28	
2	Thur.		
3	Fri.		
4	Sat.		
5	Sun.	Luke 19:41–42	Palm Sunday
6	Mon.		
7	Tue.		
8	Wed.		
9	Thur.		
10	Fri.	John 10:17–18	Good Friday
11	Sat.		
12	Sun.	1 Corinthians 15:20	Easter
13	Mon.		
14	Tue.		
15	Wed.	John 20:28	
16	Thur.		
17	Fri.		
18	Sat.		
19	Sun.	John 11:25–26	
20	Mon.		
21	Tue.		
22	Wed.	Isaiah 59:1	
23	Thur.		
24	Fri.		
25	Sat.		
26	Sun.	Matthew 28:19–20	
27	Mon.		
28	Tue.		
29	Wed.	Psalm 34:9–10	
30	Thur.		

Youth service: 1 Corinthians 15:12

Publisher: Jean-Luc Schneider,
Zurich/Switzerland
Verlag Friedrich Bischoff GmbH
Frankfurter Strasse 233
Triforum A4
63263 Neu-Isenburg, Germany
Managing director: Jürgen Kramer
Editor: Reinhard Kiefer

No part of this publication may be reproduced without the prior permission of its publisher.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version ®.
Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission.
All rights reserved.

ISSN 1867-867X

English Edition