

O Lord, We Praise Thee

Lutheran Service Book 617 | study by Shawn L. Kumm

Introduction

The week started out exciting enough. Wall-to-wall people filled Jerusalem. A donkey and her foal were found, and the Lord rode through the streets. Shouts erupted. “Hosanna! Hosanna!” Coats were thrown down; palm branches were lifted up. It was looking like a good week for Jesus and His disciples.

But as the week moved on, events became more serious and dark. “Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed...” (*LSB*, p. 162). Those oft-repeated words bring us into the darkness of the night when the Lord Jesus gathered His disciples. Sin in need of forgiveness lurks at

the table. Betrayal is in the air. As the Passover unfolds, the words of Jesus bring to fulfillment the meal itself. Yes, something old is being completed, something new is being done.

- What is your earliest memory of a Maundy Thursday service?
- When was the first time you received the Lord’s Supper? What were you thinking before, during and after the body and blood of the Lord Jesus was given to you?

Exploring the Scriptures

One of the readings appointed for today, and upon which this hymn is based, is 1 Cor. 11:23–32. Read these verses.

- Notice in verses 23–25 and 27 how many times St. Paul connects “bread” with “body” and “cup” (that is, the contents of the cup, wine) with “blood.”
- Now, in verse 26, how does St. Paul connect the bread and the cup (wine) to the body and blood of Jesus without using the words “body” and “blood”?
- Also, in verse 26, with which words does St. Paul teach you that the Lord Jesus is risen from the dead, that He is not continually sacrificed or not still dead on the cross or in a grave? See also Heb. 9:24–28; 10:10–14.

Another important reading for Holy Thursday, and upon which this hymn is based, is Matt. 26:26–28. Read these verses.

- Which words in stanza 1 reflect the fact that Jesus gives His Supper “for the forgiveness of sins” (v. 28)?

- Which words in stanza 1 sing of the Christ’s divine nature? Which words in the same stanza sing of His human nature? How are these words a comfort to you?

A third important reading for Holy Thursday is Ex. 12:1–14. Read these verses.

- In what way did God deal out justice? Who received this justice? In what way did God deal out mercy? Who received this mercy?
- We believe that Jesus is the Lamb of God, the Passover Lamb. See John 1:29, 36 and 1 Cor. 5:7b.
- Now make the connection between justice and mercy with the lamb and the blood described in Exodus, the Lamb and the blood recorded by Matthew, and the Lamb and the blood taught in 1 Corinthians. What comfort does this bring you?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

The church was familiar with the first stanza of this hymn long before Martin Luther (1483–1546) wrote stanzas 2 and 3. The hymn dates from the 1300s and was often sung during a popular festival where the Host from the Lord’s Supper was paraded in procession throughout town. As Luther began to restore singing to the congregation, he looked for hymns to sing when the Lord’s Supper was celebrated. With the revision of two lines of the first stanza and the writing of two additional stanzas, Luther took this hymn off the streets and put it back into the mouths, hearts

and minds of the people who were once again eager to eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus according to the Lord’s own words, instead of venerating and parading the Sacrament beyond the Lord’s own intended use.

One of the troubling issues of the Reformation was the offering of the Lord’s Supper in only one kind, that is, receiving only the bread and not the wine, receiving only the body and not the blood of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, Luther appreciated the medieval age of the first stanza, because the stanza showed that the people of God had indeed received

the Lord's Supper in both kinds before the aberrant practice of offering only one kind was introduced.

- What evidence do you find in the first stanza that in the 14th century, Christians received the Lord's Supper in both kinds? Why is this important? (For a detailed discussion, see the Augsburg Confession, Article XXII, and the Apology, Article XXII.)

Text

This hymn comes from a group of German hymns called "Leisen," a word which is the shortening of the prayer in Greek, "Kyrie eleison" [KIH-ree-ay eh-LEH-ee-sohn], meaning "Lord, have mercy."

- As it is interspersed after every four lines, what strong message does the refrain "Lord, have mercy" communicate to you, the singer?
- What do we learn about the mercy of the Lord from the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37)?

Making the Connection

Read the historic Gospel for Holy Thursday, John 13:1–15.

- Which verse of John 13 do you find specifically reflected in stanza 2?

The text of stanza 3 pictures us leaving the table of the Lord and going back out into the world. This same thought is prayed in the familiar words of the Post-Communion Collect:

In Closing

The forgiveness of sins through the gift of the Lord's body and blood and the continual prayer "Lord, have mercy" are inseparable. God's necessary and proper justice was fully and finally rendered upon His crucified Son, Jesus. God's gracious and loving mercy covers and permeates your life. "Lord, have mercy," we cry. He has — and He does.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 617.
- Pray the Litany (*LSB*, pp. 288–9) and reflect on how this extended prayer expands on the words from stanza 3, "And live together here in love and union" and "Give Thy Church, Lord, to see / Days of peace and unity."

- Consider 1 Peter 2:24, which is one of the foundational verses for stanzas 1 and 2. How do Peter's words expand your understanding of God's mercy and healing to you?
- What comfort do you find in Christ's wounds being the healing of your wounds? How is God's justice shown in Christ's wounds? How is God's mercy shown in the healing of your wounds?
- In what ways does this understanding of mercy expand your understanding of what Christ gives in His Supper?

Stanza 2 is transitional. It echoes the doctrine of the real presences in stanza 1 while preparing us for the reality in stanza 3 that Christ's body and blood — the forgiveness of sins — indeed has an effect on us.

- Scan stanzas 2 and 3 for these words: "us," "me," "we" and "our." Where in these two stanzas are we the recipients of God's mercy? Where in these two stanzas do we sing that this mercy may continue through us to others?

We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another... (*LSB*, p. 166)

- If the vertical posture of the Christian is toward God and the horizontal posture of the Christian is toward the neighbor, according to this hymn and to the prayer above, what opportunities of mercy are available to you as you leave the table of the Lord and go out into the world?

- Now turn to Psalm 116, the appointed psalm for Holy Thursday. In unison or responsively, offer these words as a prayer of thanksgiving for God's great gift of edible mercy through Jesus in your life.

Prayer

O Lord, in this wondrous Sacrament You have left us a remembrance of Your Passion. Grant that we may so receive the sacred mystery of Your body and blood that the fruits of Your redemption may continually be manifest in us; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Holy Thursday).