

The Fifth Sermon, March 13, 1522

Thursday after Invocavit

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We have heard of the things that are necessary, such as that the mass is not to be performed as a sacrifice, and of the unnecessary things, such as monks' leaving the monasteries, the marriage of priests, and images. We have seen how we must treat these matters, that no compulsion or ordinance must be made of them, and that no one shall be dragged from them or to them by the hair, but that we must let the Word of God alone do the work. Let us now consider how we must observe the blessed sacrament. You have heard how I preached against the foolish law of the pope and opposed his precept, that no woman shall wash the altar linen on which the body of Christ has lain, even if it be a pure nun, except it first be washed by a pure priest.

Likewise, when any one has touched the body of Christ, the priests come running and scrape his fingers, and much more of the same sort. But when a maid has slept with a naked priest, the pope winks at it and lets it go. If she becomes pregnant and bears a child, he lets that pass, too. But to touch the altar linen and the sacrament [i.e., the host], this he will not allow. But when a priest grabs it, both top and bottom, this is all right.

Against such fool laws we have preached and exposed them, in order that it might be made known that no sin is involved in these foolish laws and commandments of the pope, and that a layman does not commit sin if he touches the cup or the body of Christ with his hands. You should give thanks to God that you have come to such clear knowledge, which many great men have lacked. But now you go ahead and become as foolish as the pope, in that you think that a person must touch the sacrament with his hands.

You want to prove that you are good Christians by touching the sacrament with your hands, and thus you have dealt with the sacrament, which is our highest treasure, in such a way that it is a wonder you were not struck to the ground by thunder and lightning. All the other things God might have suffered, but this he cannot allow, because you have made a compulsion of it. And if you do not stop this, neither the emperor nor anyone else need drive me from you, I will go without urging; and I dare say that none of my enemies, though they have caused me much sorrow, have wounded me as you have.

If you want to show that you are good Christians by handling the sacrament and boast of it before the world, then Herod and Pilate are the chief and best Christians, since it seems to me that they really handled the body of Christ when they had him nailed to the cross and put to death. No, my dear friends, the kingdom of God does not consist in outward things, which can be touched or perceived, but in faith [Luke 17:20; Romans 14:17; I Corinthians 4:20].

But you may say: We live and we ought to live according to the Scriptures, and God has so instituted the sacrament that we must take it with our hands, for he said, "**Take, eat, this is my body**" [Matthew 26:26]. The answer is this: though I am convinced beyond a doubt that the disciples of the Lord took it with their hands, and though I admit that you may do the same without committing sin, nevertheless I can neither make it compulsory nor defend it. And my reason is that the devil, when he really pushes us to the wall, will argue: Where have you read in the Scriptures that "take" means "grasping with the hands"? How, then, am I going to prove or defend it? Indeed, how will I answer him when he cites from the Scriptures the very opposite, and proves that "take" does not mean to receive with the hands only, but also to convey to ourselves in other ways? "Listen to this, my good fellow," he will say, "is not the word 'take' used by three evangelists when they described the Lord's taking of gall and vinegar? [Matthew 27:34; Mark 15:23;

Luke 23:36]. You must admit that the Lord did not touch or handle it with his hands, for his hands were nailed to the cross.” This verse is a strong argument against me. Again, he cites the passage: *Et accepit omnes timor, “Fear seized them all”* [Luke 7:16], where again we must admit that fear has no hands. Thus I am driven into a corner and must concede, even against my will, that “take” means not only to receive with the hands, but to convey to myself in any other way in which it can be done.

Therefore, dear friends, we must be on firm ground, if we are to withstand the devil’s attack [Ephesians 6:11]. Although I must acknowledge that you committed no sin when you touched the sacrament with your hands, nevertheless I must tell you that it was not a good work, because it caused offense everywhere. For the universal custom is to receive the blessed sacrament from the hands of the priest. Why will you not in this respect also serve those who are weak in faith and abstain from your liberty, particularly since it does not help you if you do it, nor harm you if you do not do it.

Therefore no new practices should be introduced, unless the gospel has first been thoroughly preached and understood, as it has been among you. On this account, dear friends, let us deal soberly and wisely in the things that pertain to God, for God will not be mocked [Galatians 6:7]. The saints may endure mockery, but with God it is vastly different. Therefore, I beseech you, give up this practice.

Concerning Both Kinds in the Sacrament

Now let us speak of the two kinds. Although I hold that it is necessary that the sacrament should be received in both kinds, according to the institution of the Lord, nevertheless it must not be made compulsory nor a general law. We must rather promote and practice and preach the Word, and then afterwards leave the result and execution of it entirely to the Word, giving everyone his freedom in this matter. Where this is not done, the sacrament becomes for me an outward work and a hypocrisy, which is just what the devil wants. But when the Word is given free course and is not bound to any external observance, it takes hold of one today and sinks into his heart, tomorrow it touches another, and so on. Thus quietly and soberly it does its work, and no one will know how it all came about.

I was glad to know when some one wrote me, that some people here had begun to receive the sacrament in both kinds. You should have allowed it to remain thus and not forced it into a law. But now you go at it pell mell, and headlong force every one to it.

Dear friends, you will not succeed in that way. For if you desire to be regarded as better Christians than others just because you take the sacrament into your hands and also receive it in both kinds, you are bad Christians as far as I am concerned. In this way even a sow could be a Christian, for she has a big enough snout to receive the sacrament outwardly. We must deal soberly with such high things.

Dear friends, this dare be no mockery, and if you are going to follow me, stop it. If you are not going to follow me, however, then no one need drive me away from you—I will leave you unasked, and I shall regret that I ever preached so much as one sermon in this place. The other things could be passed by, but this cannot be overlooked; for you have gone so far that people are saying: At Wittenberg there are very good Christians, for they take the sacrament in their hands and grasp the cup, and then they go to their brandy and swill themselves full. So the weak and well-meaning people, who would come to us if they had received as much instruction as we have, are driven away.

But if there is any one who is so smart that he must touch the sacrament with his hands, let him have it brought home to his house and there let him handle it to his heart’s content. But in public let him abstain, since that will bring him no harm and the offense will be avoided which is caused to our brothers, sisters, and neighbors, who are now so angry with us that they are ready to kill us. I may say that of all my enemies who have opposed me up to this time none have brought me so much grief as you.

This is enough for today; tomorrow we shall say more.