

## Come to the table

THE CHURCH I ATTENDED when I was a boy had a beautifully carved wooden Communion table positioned front and center, right below the pulpit. A thick piece of polished glass lay on top to protect the wood from scratches.

There was a quiet dignity about that table. During the week it sat empty, while the words carved across the front proclaimed its purpose: "This do in remembrance of me." On Sunday morning, a stack of silver bread trays adorned the table, along with trays of shiny glass cups filled with sweet-smelling grape juice.

### The Table's Meaning

Even before I was old enough to understand, the table told me about the love of God. Over the years, I have learned more about the great themes of redemption and sacrifice, of God's

holiness and human sinfulness, of prophecies fulfilled at the cross and the empty tomb. I have discovered new dimensions of the story by reading about the Passover in Exodus 12, the confirmation of "the blood of the covenant" in Exodus 24, the prophetic picture of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, and Jesus' Sermon on the Bread of Life in John 6. But the table still tells the story well, employing all five senses as we see, touch, taste, and smell the bread and the cup, and hear the solemn words, "This my body . . . this is my blood."

### Will you accept the dinner invitation?

Ravi Zacharias says the traditionalist looks to the past, the existentialist lives for today, and the utopian idealizes the future. In the Lord's Supper the past,

present, and future come together. We remember what Christ did on the cross, we commune with Christ in the present, and we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

In a sermon on "The Meaning of Communion," Robert Shannon uses four words to describe the Lord's Supper. First, it is a *quest* that expresses our desire to draw close to the Lord. Second, it is an *inquest*. We ask, "Who is responsible for the death of Christ?" And we say in our hearts, "I am responsible! I am guilty. My own sins helped to put Jesus on the cross." Third,

Communion is a *bequest*. God imparts promises and blessings through it. Shannon observes, "Mistakes and failures cloud our lives. The Communion reminds us that behind those clouds, God's sun still shines." And fourth, the Lord's Supper is a *conquest*. It memorializes Jesus' victory at Calvary and reminds us that we are "more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

Professor Donald Nash wrote that the Lord's Supper consists of an upward look to God ("he gave thanks"), a backward look to Christ ("in remembrance of him"), an inward look to self ("examine oneself"), an outward look to the world ("show forth his death"), and a forward look to Heaven ("till he comes").

### The Table's Host

The greatest feature of Communion, though, is the one who hosts the meal. Jesus invites us to dinner. He says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

Christ is the focal point of our faith. His is the presence we honor. His is the sacrifice we remember. His is the "blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

It's said that when Leonardo da Vinci painted his famous picture of the Last Supper, he asked a friend what impressed him most about it. The friend replied, "The cup in the hand of Jesus. The Holy Grail brilliantly catches the eye." Swiftly, da Vinci took his paintbrush and erased the cup from the painting. He said, "Nothing must detract from the face of Jesus." ■



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