

Making Our Lord's Supper

Morris J. Niedenthal

It's a complex process. And that's what we are engaged in today: a complex process of making our Lord's Supper, and participating in it. Making our Lord's Supper and participating in it. That's what we are about. Our action began, of course, years ago-on the night in which Jesus was betrayed. He took a loaf of bread and a flask of wine, blessed them, broke the bread and gave both bread and wine to his disciples saying, "This is my body, given for you," and "This is the blood of the new covenant shed for you." That's what Jesus did and said at that first Lord's Supper. What began that night points forward to the time when we will feast with our Lord at the heavenly banquet. And in the meantime, the mean-time-which, of course, is our time-we gather to make our Lord's Supper, and participate in it.

Consider the materials, the basic materials of our Lord's communion with us: a loaf of bread or wafers and a flask of wine-not kernels of wheat, not fresh grapes-not raw materials, but rather manufactured products. Yes, yes, not raw materials but manufactured products. Think of that process.

Waldo Schwien-I like that name Schwien, sounds almost as good as Niedenthal. Waldo Schwien gave me a small bag of wheat seeds. He raised and harvested the seed on his farm near Russell, Kansas-near the farm where I grew up. I always wanted some wheat from that area because my relatives who came from Russia brought sacks of wheat with them. It was called Turkey Red wheat, and it is still a basic wheat used in making many hybrid seeds. Now, wheat is essential to the materials of our Lord's Supper, but it's incomplete by itself. We aren't going to chew on kernels of wheat today. Waldo sells his wheat to the Russell Farmers' Co-op, where Gladys Killian works. And then it's transported to Kansas City and St. Paul where some of it is ground into flour. Joe Kinard packages flour in St. Paul, which is then trucked to the supermarkets. Evi Hicks buys a five-pound bag of flour at the supermarket-in part because she had volunteered to bake a loaf of bread for the Lord's Supper on Sunday. The making of our Lord's Supper is a complex process, even in the getting of the bread. That bread is a product-tokens both of God's good creation and of human labor on it. "Into that loaf of bread," wrote one man (Bishop John Robinson), "goes the whole working life of the world-all the complicated processes of production, distribution and exchange."

Then, too, we have a flask of wine-not grapes-but a manufactured product. And in that flask of wine, we have a symbol of all life's joy and leisure-everything given to make our hearts glad and free.

Making our Lord's Supper begins as we offer the stuff of our daily lives-our work, our brains, our brawn, our friendships, our loves, our delights-and place them into the hands of Christ for him to transform and use. That's how it begins-but now a significant turn occurs in the making of

our Lord's Supper. For everything that has been offered is scarcely fit for unqualified thanksgiving and blessing. Bread symbolizes not only honest labor, but also laziness and greed and pollution of earth, and water-and, and a distribution system which allows some to eat and others to starve. And that flask of wine which symbolizes the zest and joy of life has become a byword for moral collapse and degeneration. Indeed, "The world is," as Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, "charged with the grandeur of God." But

*Generations have trod, have trod, have trod,
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil,
And wears man's smudge, and shares man's smell.*

No sentimentality, no romantic fantasizing is present in our Lord's Supper. The loaf of bread and the flask of wine also represent, quite frankly, our sinful life and world. That's why in Christ's hands, he blesses the bread and wine and gives thanksgiving. He sets them in a new relation to God so that they might become again transformed vehicles of his life-giving love and power.

Another major event in the making of our Lord's Supper. And it doesn't stop there. The loaf of bread is broken, not simply for the sake of making the distribution of bread easier, but to symbolize that our lives are identified with Christ's and are broken for a life of service and sacrifice. It expresses a form of our abiding in Christ, of making our home in him, but it also expresses Christ making his home in our bodies. As we receive Christ's broken body and sip wine from the cup, we are given power to continue making our Lord's Supper in the parts of the world we touch and affect.

So we come today and make our Lord's Supper not merely to celebrate and declare what Christ has done for us, not merely to set forward and enhance his work in us, but also to offer ourselves as bodies of his action through us. That action will take a variety of forms, but one quality will be constant. That quality was evident in old Harold, a friend of mine, who was a farmer in Wisconsin. Harold kept planting trees on the country side. Neighbors, even relatives, kidded him and ridiculed him, saying, "Harold, you aren't going to live long enough to see those trees grow up." But old Harold just kept planting them anyway. It's as though he were saying, "To hell with death, I'll keep investing in life." That's the quality of life that the power of the resurrected Christ creates. And it's that quality of life which enables you and me to continue making our Lord's Supper among people we touch and affect. Amen. So be it Lord. Amen.

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