**For All the Saints – Week of Wednesday, February 25, 2015**

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***“First Communion”***

Friends,

Last year, as we approached first communion classes, I wrote an article describing what we are doing and why. I think this is helpful for families with children in elementary school, and a good reminder for all of us. Therefore, with a few minor edits, as first communion classes begin next week, here it is:

First communion has been celebrated in the Church at various ages in a child’s life over the centuries. To this day, Eastern Orthodox churches still commune infants, and for the same reason that we baptize infants: God is the one present and doing the miraculous work of uniting us with himself in the sacraments. We simply receive, and he promises to do this work regardless of the age of the recipient. Yet most Lutheran Christians, as well as our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters and many other denominations, serve first communion to students somewhere between second and eighth grade, following a period of instruction. For many years in Lutheran tradition, first communion was part of the package when a student was confirmed in eighth grade. Yet in the last thirty or forty years, it has become common to offer classes earlier, essentially as early as it is deemed to be possible for a child to grasp the abstract concepts involved in teaching about communion.

Holy Communion is indeed participation in a supernatural mystery of God received by faith, in that he grants to us his body and blood – his real presence – in the bread and in the wine, and no one can fully grasp this miracle by intellect alone. If intellectual understanding were the exclusive criteria for receiving communion, none of us would be qualified at any age. Yet we are reminded in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29,

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. (ESV)

This passage of Scripture imparts to us the importance of Holy Communion, and the consequences of taking it lightly and not bothering to understand and reverence what we are receiving when we partake. Thus our tradition has erred on the side of education and discipleship when it comes to participation in Holy Communion for the first time.

My pastoral advice is this:

1. If you or your child has communed in good conscience without first receiving instruction, do not worry. God does the work, and his miraculous and gracious presence offered freely to you is not dependent upon your passing a class. After proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and then hearing his promise to be present in the bread and wine that is consecrated, we remind worshippers that the communion table is open to all baptized Christians, and we mean it. (If you or your child are followers of Jesus and have not yet received baptism, please speak to us… We’d be glad to help you with this step on your journey, too!)
2. If your child has been baptized, and begun to receive communion at an earlier age in another congregation, do not then deny it to them here at All Saints. How frustrating to begin to receive this gift at one congregation, and then to be denied at another… this would be counterproductive for a student who has embarked on a journey as a disciple of Jesus and who comes to the Table in good conscience. However, if they did not receive instruction, or their instruction came from a tradition that holds different beliefs about communion, it would be advisable for them to attend classes nonetheless!
3. But for any students who have not yet received instruction, and for all fourth or fifth graders who await their first communion, we offer a three-session class as a part of our students’ journey of faith in order to educate them about God’s gracious work in our lives through Holy Communion, and to mark this important step in their faith journey as they begin to experience God’s grace through Holy Communion for the rest of their lives. Parents are invited to participate in the class with their students, as it is a great discussion and learning experience for all.

So there you have it; your detailed invitation! First Communion classes are offered every year, leading up to Easter Sunday morning. The three sessions are on Wednesdays at 5:15pm on March 4, 18, and 25 (skipping the week of Spring Break); then culminating in First Communion during the Maundy Thursday worship service. I hope to see several of you next week Wednesday at First Communion, and as many of you as possible gathered around the Altar on Sunday!

God bless,

Pr John

**Scriptures for this Week:**

* **Thursday, February 26**
  + Genesis 15:1-6, 12-18
  + Romans 3:21-31
  + Psalm 22:23-31
* **Friday, February 27**
  + Genesis 16:1-6
  + Romans 4:1-12
  + Psalm 22:23-31
* **Saturday, February 28**
  + Genesis 16:7-15
  + Mark 8:27-30
  + Psalm 22:23-31
* **Sunday, March 1**
  + Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 *(Note: Isaiah 55:1-7 used in worship)*
  + Psalm 22:23-31
  + Romans 4:13-25
  + Mark 8:31-38 *(Note: Matthew 6:9-15 used in worship)*
* **Monday, March 2**
  + Genesis 21:1-7
  + Hebrews 1:8-12
  + Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45
* **Tuesday, March 3**
  + Genesis 22:1-19
  + Hebrews 11:1-3, 13-19
  + Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45
* **Wednesday, March 4**
  + Jeremiah 30:12-22
  + John 12:36-43
  + Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45

**Schedule for this Week:**

**Wednesday, Feb 25th**  
**6:15pm**  
Lenten Dinner  
***7:00-8:00pm***  
Lenten Service  
Divorce Care Support Group (Prayer Rm)  
Chancel Choir Rehearsal (Choir Room)  
  
**Thursday, Feb 26th**  
***7:00-9:00pm***  
Praise Team Rehearsal (Sanctuary)  
  
**Saturday, Feb 28th**  
***8:30am***  
Sandwich Making  
  
**Sunday, Mar 1st**  
***8:45-9:45am***  
Traditional Worship (Sanctuary)  
***10:00-10:45am***  
Sunday School 5yr to 2nd Grade (CLC Room 12)  
Sunday School 3rd to 5th Grade (Jr. High Rm)  
Jr. High & Sr. High (Sr. Rm)   
Adult Bible Study Class (Library)  
***10:15am***      
New Members Class (Pastors Office)         
***11:00-12:00pm***  
Contemporary Worship (Sanctuary)  
   
***3:00pm***     
Confirmation Class (Jr. Rm)  
***4:00-6:00pm***      
Jr. High 4th thru 8th Grade (Jr. Rm)  
***5:00-7:00pm***      
Sr. High (Sr. Rm  
   
**Monday, Mar 2nd**  
***7:00-9:00pm***  
All Ministry Boards Meeting 