

**Matthew 26:26-28** *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." 27Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

There are 2 facts about soldiers that I think is important for us to think about tonight. First, it might not surprise you to hear that soldiers need more strength and energy to fight a battle than an average person needs to make it through a day. What might surprise you is how much more. Military studies have found that soldiers typically burn 4,200 calories a day during combat. This is in comparison to an adult man who may burn 2-3,000 calories a day. In some cases, that doubles the calories that a warrior needs to sustain his strength and energy in combat. It makes sense. In addition to the physical exertion of assaulting and maneuvering on an enemy, most soldiers carry anywhere from 25-50 extra pounds of gear in addition to ammunition. All of this has been scientifically figured out to make sure that the army supplies their soldiers with the correct amount of food to give them the energy and strength they need to survive combat. So the MREs—Meals, Ready to Eat—have been designed to give the soldiers the correct amount of calories and nutrition to sustain them. Each MRE has about 1300 calories. Eating 3 MRE's per day will give a soldier the physical energy and strength he needs to sustain him in combat.

The other fact that we want to consider tonight is that while our soldiers are fighting for their country, to protect and defend our constitution and to keep our fellow citizens safe, when they're on the battlefield, most soldiers will tell you they are fighting for themselves and the guys that are fighting next to them. Whatever the politicians might be saying about why we are engaged in a fight, whatever is happening on the other side, in a battle it's you against the other guy. So we could say there is a very personal element to combat. Combat is personal because it comes down to what happens to you on the field of battle. When I served, it was pounded into our heads: "There are two kinds of people on the battlefield: the quick and the dead. Which one are you going to be?" Soldiers need plenty of strength to fight the personal battles that combat brings.

I start with these two facts about soldiers because they also apply on the spiritual battlefield as well. All throughout our midweek services, we've been looking at Jesus' suffering and death from the perspective of a soldier. Jesus was not the only warrior in this battle against the devil. You and I are engaged in a daily battle with the devil for our souls. That makes spiritual combat very personal. You might have some overlying themes of God vs. the Devil or the Church vs. Evil, but in the heat of the spiritual battle, it's one on one. Mano y mano. Spiritual battle is very personal to each one of us. It doesn't matter that others have withstood this temptation or fallen to that temptation. What matters is how you react when engaged in battle. This daily spiritual battle that you and I have to fight against the devil, the world and our sinful flesh is long and exhausting. It's not a battle we can win by ourselves. Tonight, our Savior Jesus reminds us of the Spiritual Energy he gives us for Personal Battle.

Jesus and his disciples had gathered for a feast that night. It was the Passover feast, the yearly festival set by God to commemorate the deliverance of Israel from the land of Egypt. The Israelites gathered annually at this feast to celebrate the angel of death passing over the homes of the Israelites. God had commanded each family to sacrifice a year-old lamb without defect and to spread the lamb's blood over the doorposts of their houses. God would send the angel of death and it would pass over any home who had blood covering the doorposts. In any house that did not have the blood on the doorpost, the angel of death would kill the first-born male. As they celebrated the Passover each year, they remembered the deliverance God had given to them when he spared them from death but brought death to every firstborn male in Egypt.

This year, however, the celebration was different. In the middle of their Passover meal, Jesus started a new feast which would replace the Passover celebration. We're told that Jesus took bread. There was nothing special about the bread. It was the regular unleavened bread they would have eaten with the meal. When he prayed and asked for the Father's blessings, he broke the bread and gave it to them saying, "*Take and eat. This is my body.*" It was so simple. He didn't need to explain it. The words were clear: "*This is my body.*" With equal simplicity, he did the same thing with the cup. He took the normal wine that was part of their meal, gave thanks to God above for it and simply told the disciples, "*This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*"

It's so simple that we may miss the glory in it. Perhaps it becomes so regular and routine that we miss the glory that is presented. Here is the Savior of the world—God's own son. Here is the one who came to offer his body and blood for the sins of the world. And he institutes a new feast that will bring forgiveness to his disciples for the very sins they were committing that night. He gave his body and blood in, with and under the bread and the wine to bring to them forgiveness for their sins. In Holy Communion, the Lamb of God offers himself as the spiritual food for the soul and to quench our thirst for forgiveness. God comes to his people in love to deliver them from their sins and bring them the deliverance they so desperately need. This is the same Jesus who the very next afternoon would shout from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And the reason God did this is simple: he wanted your salvation. He forsook this very Jesus whose body and blood we partake in the sacrament because he wanted Jesus to suffer the torments of hell in your place. The only way for God to reconcile you to himself was for Jesus to be abandoned by his father, pay for the sin that separated us from God and endure the torment of hell as our substitute.

This same Jesus comes to us in the sacrament of Holy Communion and says, "Come with hearts that are broken because of sin, guilt and shame. Come with souls that are starving for food that will strengthen you for the ongoing battle you fight with the devil. Come with a heart parched with a thirst for salvation. Come and eat and drink the price of your salvation in this feast of feasts." What strength God offers to us in the Lord's Supper as he forgives our sins and removes the burden of guilt and shame from our shoulders. God strengthens us as he announces that he not only has established fellowship with us, but he established a binding and lasting covenant that nothing could remove, even if the mountains were shaken and the hills removed. With this Holy Supper, God refreshes and renews our soul so that we can go out and keep fighting against the devil. He gives us all the energy we need and then some to keep up this fight.

Oh, how we need this strength. The battle we fight is long and arduous. Not only do we fight the temptations of the devil and the world on the outside, but the desires and lusts of our sinful flesh on the inside. This fight is very personal. Every one of us battles different things in this spiritual fight. Some battle hatred and anger and harboring grudges. Some battle sexual lusts and desires. Others battle pride and arrogance and selfish indulgence. Still others battle greed and materialism and overindulgence. Some battle the doubts of God's love and questions about if God cares about us. Who of us can fight these battles and remain perfect in thought, word and deed? The easy answer is: None! In fact, the temptations on the outside might be way easier for us to stand up to instead of the battles that come from within. Too often we fall. Too often we give in. We may fight and fight and do so successfully, until in a moment of weakness we cave and give in. The battle is personal...and too often we lose it miserably. We know the guilt and shame that burden our hearts. Even worse, we know the hell that we deserve to suffer every time that we fall.

Yet, tonight, Jesus comes to each of us individually and says, all this is "for you." His body and his blood shed on Calvary's cross were given and shed for you...personally...individually...to comfort and assure you of his forgiveness and to give you the certainty of eternal life with him. This is what gives us the strength to keep fighting. The war against the devil has already been won. With his sacrificial death on Good Friday and his resurrection from the grave, we have God's guarantee that we will be victorious in this fight. Heaven is our home and graciously through Jesus our Savior it is waiting for us. That gift is yours! That gift God gives and guarantees through the Sacrament of Holy Communion as he miraculously gives to you his very body given for you and the blood shed for you in, with and under the bread and the wine.

Sadly, given the circumstances we find ourselves in today, we aren't able to partake of the body and blood this evening. I do offer opportunities each week for personal/private communion. If you haven't seen the link to sign up for this, please let me know and I'm glad to send it to you. Yet you can leave here this evening with the assurance that God's forgiveness is yours through Jesus your Savior. He gave his life to pay the punishment you deserve for your sins and he shed his blood to cleanse you of your sin. Hopefully, absence from the sacrament will make our hearts grow even fonder for it. What a treat when we are able to gather together again to participate in this sacrament. What a strengthening meal our Savior offers to us. He gives us all the spiritual strength that we need for the personal battles we have to fight. Amen.