

“No poison can be in the cup that my Physician sends me.”

What God ordains is always good.

His loving tho't attends me;

No poison can be in the cup

That my Physician sends me.

(TLH 521:3 / LW 422:3 / LSB 760:3)

From the Church's infancy, the chalice has been used in the celebration of Holy Communion. And while there is much to be said in favor of using the chalice, or common cup, to receive the blood of our Lord, for many, this practice is new and different. Some history and explanation might be helpful as you're deciding whether or not to begin receiving the blood of Christ from the common cup.

Here are a couple of helpful passages from God's Word. From the the Gospel of Mark, chapter 14: “And he [Jesus] took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:23-24). And from 1 Corinthians 10: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16).

One of the main reason I've heard as to why some do not take the common cup is “hygiene.” Let me address that concern briefly and share with you an article that explains further. The use of the chalice (or “common cup”) was universal throughout the whole Church—including Lutheran congregations—for the first nineteen centuries of the Church. It wasn't until the twentieth century that its use became more infrequent. One of the reasons for replacing it with “individual glasses” was, you guessed it, hygiene. People believed that germs were easily transmitted by using the chalice. However, studies have shown that that's actually not the case. Here's why: the combination of the noble metal of the chalice (such as gold or silver) together with the alcohol content of the wine makes the possibility for germs to be transmitted almost nonexistent. The following article explains further:

Can I get sick from using the common cup? No! The use of the common cup was traditional in all Christian churches until this century and was eliminated because of fears about sanitary matters concerning the transmission of disease. The question about disease transmission is answered best by the scientific community. A thorough study on the use of the common cup was done by professors Burroughs and Hemmers in 1965 and was reported in the Journal of Infectious Diseases. Their conclusion was:

Experiments on the transmission of organisms from one person to another by common use of the chalice showed that 0.001% of the organisms transferred even under the most favorable conditions and when conditions approximated those of actual use, no transmission could be detected.

Recent concerns about the transmission of AIDS confirm this study. Dr. David Ho in the New England Journal of Medicine (December 1985) provided documentation that verified that there was no spread of the AIDS virus in saliva through common eating or drinking utensils. In effect, AIDS is spread only through sexual contact or the exchange of blood. No case of AIDS victims studied to date has shown any possibility of communicating the disease through saliva.

Concerns about the chalice and AIDS are motivated more by fear than by scientific research, since no scientific research exists to connect the two.

It is through hands that most disease is transmitted, which makes Communion by intinction more prone to disease than receiving the common cup, since those who give the Sacrament touch both the Host and Wine. And how many hands touch the “little glasses “? The alternative is to reject the command of Christ and refrain from Communion altogether.

Lutherans should remember that Martin Luther restored the cup when Roman Catholics had all but eliminated it from the peoples' Communion. He did it because his loyalty was to the command of Christ in the Bible. The use of the common cup was normative until the late nineteenth century and was eliminated in those churches in which Communion was not understood as being the Body and Blood of Christ.

Some Lutherans allow other methods of distribution, believing that the method of distribution does not matter. However, the use of the common chalice retains that which Our Lord indicated was His desire. And its effect, where used, is to transmit not only salvation but also the oneness that comes from sharing the Blood of Christ from the Chalice in common with one's sisters and brothers. All the faithful respond to Christ's words: “Then He took a cup, and when He had returned thanks, He gave it to them, ‘Drink all of you from this,’ He said.” (St. Matthew 26:27, Jerusalem Bible)

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