

Dr. Martin Luther's House Postil

Sermons on the Gospels for the Church Year



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Dr. Martin Luther's House Postil

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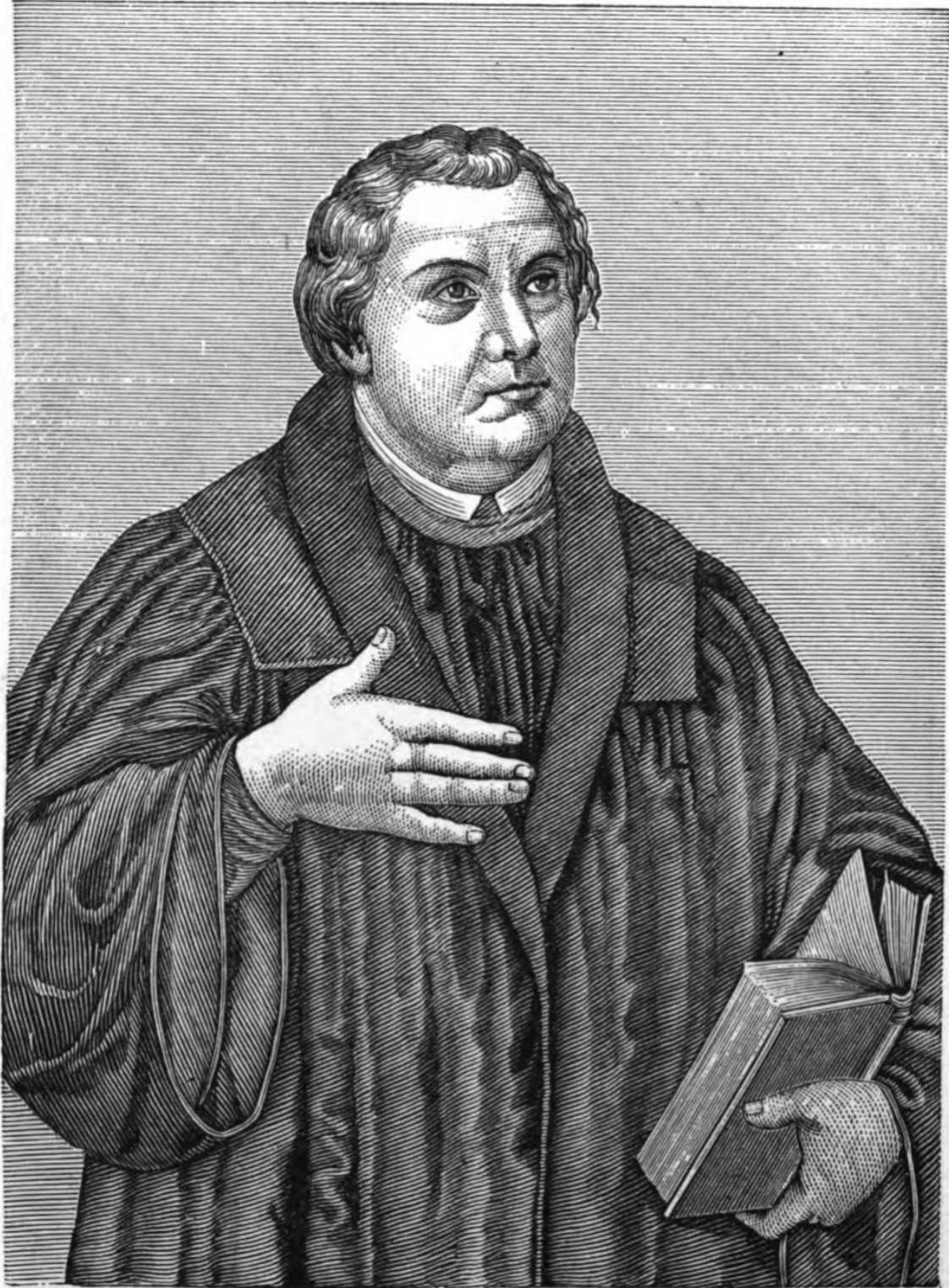
Dr. Martin Luther's House Postil

Sermons on the Gospels for the Sundays and Principal Festivals of the Church Year

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY MATTHIAS LOY

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Dr Martin Luther.

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Preface by Lutheran Librarian

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A Note about Typos [Typographical Errors]:

Over time we are revising the books to make them better and better. If you would like to send the errors you come across to us, we'll make sure they are corrected.

Preface To The English Edition.

One of the most deeply felt wants of the Ev. Lutheran Church in this country has been that of books setting forth her genius and doctrines in the English language. Many are ignorant of her character who would gladly be informed, if the means were within their reach. Many would love her, if they only knew her. Many who love her well would labor more zealously for her welfare, if they knew her more intimately. Some have taken advantage of the paucity of means for obtaining information respecting her, and have injured her by misrepresentation. AH that she needs ask is a candid hearing; but to secure it she must speak in the language of the people among whom she lives and labors.

The literature of the Lutheran Church is rich in every branch of sacred learning: in some departments she stands without a rival. But unhappily her treasures have been mostly locked up in Latin and German caskets, to which but comparatively few have keys. This has impeded her progress and hindered her prosperity among the American people, and been a source of regret to many who pray for the prosperity of Jerusalem. Her circumstances demand that these treasures be unlocked for the glory of her Lord.

The publisher of this volume has determined to contribute, according to his ability, towards accomplishing this end by publishing Lutheran books in the English language. That he has chosen Luther's sermons, in pursuance of this design, requires no explanation, and certainly no apology. Not only Lutherans, but Christians of almost every name, must acquiesce in the judgment that the great reformer has a right to be heard; and those who prize the pure truth which was again brought to light in the glorious reformation, will hail with joy the announcement that the greatest preacher since the days of St. Paul is now to address the everlasting Gospel in his own vigorous way to the English community.

Of the translation it will not be necessary to say much, as the reader has it before him and can judge for himself of its merits. That it is faithful to the original, which was the chief end aimed at, will, we trust, be the verdict of all. Those who are acquainted with Luther's peculiar style need not be reminded that it is no easy task to reproduce "his sentences in another language; but we doubt not that the incomparable Luther will everywhere be recognized in these sermons, though it be not his mother tongue in which he here preaches.

It is proper to state that the translation was made by Rev. E. Schmid, A. M., Professor in Capital University, excepting the first six sermons, which had previously been translated by Rev. D M. Martens, A. M., and that the whole passed through the hands of the present writer before it was given to the printer.

It is the publisher's purpose, if this volume shall meet with favor, to complete the House Postil in three additional volumes, and, if sufficient encouragement be given, to issue translations of other works of Luther. The second volume will be issued as soon as the sales of the present shall justify the undertaking.

In the hope that these sermons, which, through three centuries, have strengthened and cheered so many millions of souls in their original form, will be found of service in building up the Redeemer's kingdom also in their English dress, we commend the volume to the Holy Christian Church, whose welfare it is designed to promote.

M. Loy.

Columbus, Ohio, June 26th, 1869.

Dr. Martin Luther's Preface To His House Postil

These sermons were preached by me at certain times in my dwelling, in the presence of my household, that I, as the head of the family, might do my duty towards them, by instructing them how to lead a Christian life. God grant that they may have heard these words not only with their ears, but that their hearts may also have retained them. I sincerely hope that my endeavors may not have been fruitless, according to Isaiah 55:

“My word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”

Though some of the seed may have fallen by the wayside, some upon stony ground, and some among thorns, there is also good ground, here and there, where it will bring forth fruit and not return void. A German proverb says: A pertinent saying shall find an attentive hearer. If there are but few who heed it, there is, at least, now and then one who will do so, so that it is not spoken entirely in vain.

It would seem as if the Patriarchs had practiced this custom of preaching in their dwellings to their households. We read that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob now and then erected altars, around which, together with their whole family, they worshiped the Lord by preaching, by prayer and by giving thanks to God. Afterwards others, neighbors and those dwelling in adjacent hamlets and towns, met with them for the same purpose. It is not to be presumed that a Patriarch would build an altar for his own exclusive use, but rather that his wife, his children and servants also congregated there, and followed the example of the master of the house. He could not be silent on such occasions, but performed the part of pastor and preacher by instructing them and telling them of the promises which God had made to

them. When the neighbors convened with them, such household sermons became public and of a parochial character, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles and Matt. 10. Christ gave the command to His disciples that they should first preach in the houses, where the neighbors would congregate, and afterwards whole cities and countries should form churches.

I was not aware, however, of the fact that these my household sermons were taken down by Magister Veit Dietrich; much less did I expect them to appear in print, and to be distributed throughout the land. I thought they were long since forgotten; but if they can please and edify others, I rejoice at it, and willingly give them as mere fragments and crumbs which have been left. For we now have the Bible itself, thanks be to God! and also the copious and valuable writings of many learned men, from which a Christian can easily derive instruction. As the proverb says: The cow wades in pastures up to her body, thus it is with us in our day; we are abundantly supplied with the rich and nourishing pasture of the Divine Word. God grant that we may use it with gratitude to our growth and strength, before the time of famine comes as the reward of our ingratitude; may we be preserved from the fate of feeding on thorns and pebbles again, as we were forced to do while under the pope, but may we rather bring forth much fruit and be the disciples of Christ, John 16. Unto Him be all praise and honor now and forever!

Amen.

Volume 1

First Sunday In Advent.

Matthew 21:1-9

And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. – Matt. 21:1-9

The Jews had many beautiful and glorious promises concerning the Messiah or Christ, how He should appear on earth, establish an everlasting kingdom, redeem His people from all evil, and help them forever; as we see in all the writings of the prophets, that they speak beyond measure gloriously concerning the future kingdom of Christ. And these writings were well known to the Jews. But false preachers and carnal teachers arose, who taught the people the opinion, which they gladly received and to which their hearts were inclined, that Christ would come in worldly glory, and make an entry in power, as other worldly kings are accustomed to do, so that everything should be most grand and gorgeous; that He would make the

Jews powerful princes and rulers all over the world; as they think even today, that when their Messiah shall come, they shall be lords of all the world, and the heathens their servants. After such a Messiah or Christ they are still gaping, but do not long for the Messiah, i. e. the Lord Christ, that He should deliver them from sin and eternal death.

That the Jews might be warned and not permit themselves to be deceived by such carnal teachers, God long before proclaimed in plain words through the prophet Zechariah that Christ would not come as a temporal king in great pomp and splendor, but that He would enter Jerusalem, in which, as the capital of the country, was the temple and its service, without all worldly grandeur, riding upon an ass, as the Gospel relates.

And that the Jews might not excuse themselves and say: If we had known that He would come in such poverty, we would have looked for it and received Him, the prophet told them this very clearly so long a time before. And the event took place in the full light of day, that the Savior rode upon the borrowed ass, without saddle or anything else, the apostles laying their clothes upon it, so that the poor king could sit thereon.

Therefore the Jews can by no means excuse themselves. For here is clear and plain prophecy: When Christ shall ride into Jerusalem, He will not come, as worldly kings are wont, on a proud steed, clothed in armor, with implements of war, but He will come, as the Evangelist says, meek, or as the prophet terms it, lowly. It is as if the prophet would thus warn everyone, saying: Mark well the ass, and know that He who comes on it is the true Messiah. Therefore, beware; do not look for a golden crown, sumptuous apparel or costly ornaments, or any great display. For Christ will come poor, with a meek and lowly heart, and will not be seen otherwise than riding upon an ass. This is all the pomp and glory He will show the world at His entry into Jerusalem.

This prophecy induced our Lord now to make this entry, and He attaches much importance to it. Therefore He also gives the disciples such strict command about this matter; and will not enter Jerusalem by night, or secretly, but openly in the full light of day; not alone, but in the midst of a great multitude of people going before and following after, calling aloud to Him as the true Son of David, and wishing Him great prosperity in His kingdom. Jerusalem must know of this entry, must see and hear the ass and

this poor King, concerning whom Zechariah had prophesied, warning the Jews not to be offended at His poverty and humble entry, but to dismiss their idea that Christ would come with great worldly pomp. He will indeed be a king, says Zechariah, but a humble, poor king, who has nothing of the appearance of a king, judging by the outward pomp which worldly kings and princes usually show before men.

On the other hand, says Zechariah, this poor and humble King will have a power greater than that of all emperors and kings who have ever lived on earth, great as their power may have been. For He is called *Justus et Salvator*. Not a rich, noble and mighty king before the world, but the Just One and Savior, who shall bring with Him righteousness and salvation, attack sin and death, be the enemy of sin and destroyer of death; for He comes for the purpose of saving from sin and eternal death all who believe in Him, receive Him as their king, and are not offended at the poor borrowed ass. Those who receive Him in faith and find their consolation in Him, receive forgiveness of sins, and shall not die, but live forever. And though after their bodies they must die and be buried, it shall be to them, and be called by them, not death, but only a sleep.

This the prophet would teach us of this King, when he gives Him these two glorious, nay divine, titles and names, calling Him the Just One and Savior, who shall rob death of his power, hell of its destruction, tread the devil under His feet, and thus deliver us who believe in Him from sin and death, and introduce us to the society of angels, where there is eternal life and salvation. He leaves other kings in possession of their external government, authority, pomp, castles, houses, money and goods, allows them also to eat, drink, clothe themselves, and build in a more costly manner than other people; but this art they do not understand, this work they cannot do, which this poor and humble King, Christ, understands and does. For no emperor, king or temporal authority, with all their power, can deliver you from one sin, or with their money and goods heal the least disease, much less afford help against eternal death and hell. But this lovely King, Christ, delivers me, not only from one sin, but from all my sins, and not me only, but the whole world. He comes to take away not only sickness, but death, and not only from me, but from the whole world.

This is what the Evangelist desires to have announced to the daughter of Zion from the prophet; not to be offended at His lowly coming, but to close

the eyes and open the ears, that she may not see in what poverty He rides, but hear what is said of this poor King. Reason looks only on this poor and humble form, that He rides upon an ass without saddle or spurs, like a beggar, and is offended at it; but does not see that He can deliver us from sin, destroy death, and give us everlasting holiness, righteousness, eternal salvation and eternal life. Therefore we must tell and proclaim it, that the people may hear and believe. This is what the Evangelist means when he says: "Tell ye the daughter of Zion." Why? In order that she may know it, and not heed, nor be offended at this, that He comes in such poverty and soon after dies ignominiously. For all this takes place for your good, in order that He, as a Savior, may help you against the devil and death, to sanctify and deliver you from sin. Whoever will not receive this with his ears and heart, but would see it with his eyes and feel it with his hands, deprives himself of this King; for it is very different from what we find it with other kings. What they do, they do with pomp, and everything has a grand, imposing appearance. In Christ we do not find this; His office and work is to help us from sin and death, and this He does in no other external manner but through His word and gospel, which He orders to be told and preached to us, and through the signs which He gives besides the promise, through which also He works and shows His power; as that He first plunges us into baptism, where our eyes see nothing but simple water, like other water. Likewise, He has comprehended it in the word we are preaching, where our eyes see nothing but man's breath. But we must beware and not follow our eyes here, but shut our eyes, open our ears and hear the word. This teaches us how our Lord Jesus shed His blood for the forgiveness of our sins, that we might live. These gifts He would bestow upon us in holy baptism, in the Lord's Supper, in the preaching and absolution; there we certainly find them. Now it is true, it seems small matter. that through the washing of water, through the word and sacrament, such great things should be accomplished; but do not let your eyes deceive you. There also it seemed a small matter that He who rode on a borrowed ass, and afterwards suffered Himself to be crucified, should take away sin, death and hell. No one could see it in His appearance; but the prophet says so. Therefore we must simply receive it with our ears, and believe it with our hearts; with our eyes we cannot see it. Hence the Evangelist says, as already mentioned: "Tell ye the daughter of Zion." And the prophet says: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, behold thy King cometh unto thee," as if he would say: This is told to

you and God wishes to have it proclaimed to you, that you may find consolation in Him by faith, and be defended by such faith against doubt and despair on account of your unworthiness and sins. What is it that is told, and on account of which she is to rejoice? It is this: “Behold thy King cometh unto thee.”

What kind of a king? A holy and just King, a Physician and Savior, or Helper, who would heal and save you. He would give His glory and righteousness to you, that you may be free from your sins; His life also He would lay down for you, that through His death you may be delivered from eternal death. Therefore be not offended at His lowly and humble form, but thank Him for it, and comfort yourself in Him. For all that He does and accomplishes in His coming, is done for your good; thus He would deliver you from your sins and from death, and justify and save you.

This now is our King, the dear Lord Jesus Christ, and this is His kingdom and office. It deals not with golden crowns and kingdoms, or with great worldly pomp; no, but when we must die, and cannot retain this life any longer, then it is His office and work to deliver us from sin, death and the power of hell; and through the preaching of the gospel He announces to us that we shall certainly receive this gift or benefit from Him, so that when we are in trouble on account of our sins, or in danger of death, we can comfort ourselves by faith and say: Now help is afforded me through my dear King, Jesus Christ, the Just One and Savior; to this end He came, so lowly and poor, and suffered Himself to be nailed to the cross, that He might justify and sanctify me; in Himself He hath destroyed my sin and death, gives me His own righteousness and victory over death and hell, and gives me also His Holy Spirit, that I might have in my heart a sure seal and witness of His help. See now, whoever believes this as he hears it, and as it is preached in the gospel, he also has it. For to this end holy baptism was instituted by our Savior that He might clothe you with His righteousness, and that His holiness and innocence should be yours. For we are all poor sinners, but in baptism, and afterwards in our whole life, if we turn unto Christ, He comforts us, and says: Give me your sins and take my righteousness and holiness; let your death be taken from you, and put on my life. This is, properly speaking, the Lord Jesus’ government. For all His office and work is this, that He daily takes away our sin and death, and clothes us with His righteousness and life.

This announcement we should indeed hear with great joy, and every one should thereby be bettered and made more holy. But alas, the contrary is true, and the world grows worse as it grows older, becoming the very Satan himself, as we see that the people are now more dissolute, avaricious, unmerciful, impure and wicked than previously under the papacy. What causes this? Nothing else than that the people disregard this preaching, do not use it aright for their own conversion and amendment, that is, for the comfort of their conscience, and thankfulness for the grace and benefit of God in Christ; but every one is more concerned for money and goods, or other worldly matters, than for this precious treasure which Christ brings us. For the most of us, when we do not feel our misery, the fear of sin and death, would rather, like the Jews, have such a king in Christ as would give us riches and ease here on earth, than that we should comfort ourselves in Him in the midst of poverty, crosses, wretchedness, fear and death. The world takes no delight in this, and because the gospel and Christ do not give it what it desires, it will have nothing to do with Christ and the gospel. Therefore our Lord in turn rebukes this world and says: Do you not rejoice in this, nor thank me, that through the sufferings and death of my only begotten Son, I take away your sins and death? Then I will give you sin and death enough, since you want it so; and where you were possessed of and tormented by only one devil, you shall now be tormented by seven that are worse. We see farmers, citizens and all orders, from the highest to the lowest, guilty of shameful avarice, inordinate life, impurity and other vices. Therefore let every one who would be a Christian be hereby warned as of God himself, joyfully and thankfully to hear and receive this announcement, and also pray to God to give him a strong faith, that he may hold fast this doctrine; then surely the fruit will follow, that he will daily become more humble, obedient, gentle, chaste and pious. For this doctrine is of a character to make godly, chaste, obedient, pious people. But those who will not gladly receive it, become seven times worse than they were before they heard it, as we see everywhere. And the hour will surely come when God will punish this unthankfulness. Then it will appear what the world has merited by it. Now, since the Jews would not obey the prophet, it is told to us that our King comes meek and lowly, in order that we may learn wisdom from their sad experience, and not be offended by His poverty, nor look for worldly pomp and riches, like the Jews; but learn that in Christ we have a King who is the Just One and Savior, and willing to

help us from sin and eternal death. This announcement, I say, we should receive with joy, and with hearty thanks to God, else we must take the devil, with wailing, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The example of the Apostles and others who here enter in with our Savior, admonishes us to the same. For since the Lord Jesus is a King, He must also have a kingdom or people, and these must render Him, as their King, becoming service. What this service is, this history tells us. For here we find people who acknowledge Christ as King, and are not ashamed to walk by the side of the ass, on which this King rides. Among these the Apostles are the first who acknowledge this Lord as the true Messiah that justifies sinners, and is a Savior from death. Therefore “they bring the ass,” that is, they direct the Jews, who have hitherto lived under the law and borne its burden, to Christ. Besides the ass they bring to Christ also the young colt, the heathen, who were yet unbridled and not under the law. For Christ is a Savior of all men; all preachers and teachers must lead every one to Him. This is one becoming service we should render this King, that we acknowledge, receive, praise and glorify Him as the Just One and Savior, and direct every one to Him.

Another service is that we also “sing hosanna” to this Christ, that is, that we wish prosperity to His kingdom, let our confession of Him be heard publicly, and do everything we can for the growth and promotion of His kingdom. For the word “hosanna” means as much as: “O Lord help, Lord give success to the Son of David,” as we pray also in the Lord’s prayer: “Thy kingdom come.” For the devil and his servants will not fail to make every possible effort to hinder this kingdom, and either to destroy or adulterate the word. We must therefore wish and pray, that God would hinder and repel the will of the devil.

The third is, that we “take our garments and spread them in the way” for the Lord Jesus, which is done when we, to the best of our ability, help the office of the ministry with our money and goods, in order that good, learned and pious men may be educated to teach in the Church; and when we support those who are in this office in such a manner, that they can wait on their office and studies, and not neglect them. In short when we use our money and goods to the end that the offices in the Church may be well filled, and the people provided with good officers, then we spread our garments in the way for Christ, that He may ride along with all the more

honor. Thus we ought to serve the King, and not pay any heed to the High Priests and Pharisees, who look with no favor on this entry with so little pomp and display, and are full of anger and impatience because He is called a King, and received and honored as such, desiring to prevent it if they could. But Christ will not allow them to prevent it. For since He is a King, He must also have His courtiers and court-service. And happy are they who serve Him, for He is a King who will serve us again; yea, He comes for the sole purpose of serving us, not with money and goods, but with righteousness against sin and help against death and eternal damnation.

Therefore we should be ready and willing to serve Him, and pay no heed to the vain talk and example of the pope, bishops and others, who do not, like the Apostles, lead the ass to Christ and set Him thereon, but wish to throw Him off and rule over the people themselves, after their own pleasure, with doctrines of men; who cannot endure it that He should ride with His gospel and be seen or heard. These false teachers also have their disciples, who play the hypocrite for them and strew palm and olive branches in the road before them, but throw stones at Christ; for they persecute His gospel and all who preach it. Such will at last become conscious, with the Jews, that they have despised the just King and Savior, whilst those who have received and confessed Him, and turned their poverty to His service, will receive from Him eternal life and glory.

Second Sunday In Advent. Luke 21:25-36

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. And He spake to them a parable: Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is nigh at hand. So likewise when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. – Luke 21:25-36.

It has always been God's way, from the beginning of the world, that when He would introduce something new, He sends great signs beforehand. Thus, when He was about to punish the Egyptians and deliver His people from their hand and make of them a peculiar people, He first sent all kinds of signs, both bad and good; as locusts, hail, boils, etc., which were terrible and destructive to the Egyptians, until at last all the first-born were killed in one night, and the rest of the people drowned in the Red Sea. But to the

Jews were given favorable signs; God led them through the Red Sea on dry ground, caused their enemies to be drowned in it, gave them bread from heaven, and the like. This was a sure indication that God intended to do something great with this people, to introduce a new government and order. And similar indications were given when He was about to punish the hard-hearted Jews and spread His kingdom in the Christian Church over the whole earth. For when the Lord Jesus hung on the cross, the graves were opened and the dead came forth; there was also an extraordinary eclipse of the sun, and an earthquake, and the veil of the temple was rent in twain. This was all a sure indication of a new order of things, that Judaism should fall and the kingdom of Christ be established and spread abroad.

This divine plan, not to do anything great without sending special signs beforehand, the Jews well knew, having learned it by their own experience. Therefore the Apostles here come to the Lord Jesus and ask Him what sign shall precede the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, before the one and eternal kingdom of Christ shall be established. For, since they had so often heard and are now certain that He is to be a King, and according to the Scriptures to extend His kingdom over the whole world, yet see that His own people, and especially the city of Jerusalem, does still not receive Him, but those who are highest in authority persecute Him, they think that He must do something great in order to gain and retain His kingdom and authority, and punish and cast down His enemies. They think, according to their old Jewish notions, that it will be accomplished with external might and power; or that He must send great signs and wonders from heaven, as Elijah did, and as several of His Apostles wished Him to show the Samaritans who would not receive Him. They now wished to know the signs and indications beforehand, when His kingdom should begin, and how He would introduce it. For they still had a longing after external worldly power, and were still too far from the true knowledge of the eternal kingdom of Christ, which was not, after the manner of the world, to rule over lands and people, or thus make changes in the governments, but should be a spiritual, eternal kingdom in the hearts of men, through the office of the ministry of the gospel, and by the Holy Ghost.

Hereupon the Lord answers them and says: There shall indeed signs precede not only the destruction and end of the city of Jerusalem, but also of the whole world; for the temple, together with the whole city and all its

government, shall, on account of the persecution of the gospel, be destroyed, and that at no distant day. But when they (those who shall live to witness it) shall see the city surrounded by a host, it shall be a sufficient sign to them that the end is near, and they must not think that they shall yet rule with Him in the land of Judea. In like manner He says that everywhere in the world there shall be seen signs of its end; therefore they should not think that He would establish a new order and government, in which everything would accord with their wishes and in which there would be universal obedience to their imaginary beautiful order; but should know that His kingdom is not of this world, and that the world will persecute and oppress Christ and His Gospel and Church, until the end. The signs by which it shall be preceded do not consist in this, that He would interfere with the kingdoms by exercising external might and power, or by His appearing as Lord of this world, as they then still thought that everything would be subject to Him, and that everywhere in the world His Christians would rule; but only such signs shall be seen which indicate that God will in the end let this world perish with all that is in it; and such signs shall be seen in the sky, the sun, the stars, in the sea, on earth and in all creatures, so that every one can see that in the end everything must perish together in one mass. And such signs shall be an indication to the Church of God, that on earth and in the present life she shall not have temporal peace, rest or joy, but that in this wicked world she shall have much great and severe tribulation and anguish, and shall not only be persecuted by the world, without bodily protection and help, but shall also suffer most by those common punishments, with which God will visit the world, so that it shall seem as if God would suffer her to be overwhelmed altogether. To sum up, it must come to this, that the Church must learn not to comfort herself with this world and its life, dominion and treasures, but to consider and know this beforehand, that henceforth it shall become worse and worse in this life, especially in the times when those terrible punishments and confusion shall prevail in the world, and that thus she shall remain in tribulation to the end; and yet amid such punishments and the destruction of the world, God will wonderfully preserve her until that day when the Son of God shall come, create new heavens and earth, cast all the wicked into everlasting punishment and make an end of all evil for His elect. This is the chief point of the sermon of our Lord concerning the signs, which we should especially observe, so as not to trouble ourselves with the questions, how or when, or

how long or how short a time before the end of the world such signs shall take place. It is sufficient for us to learn, in the first place, that Christ would hereby show us that just as God has sent manifold signs of His wrath against sin, and of His punishment into the world at all times, so these terrible signs shall always remain, which shall indicate and bring with them horrible punishments, but in the last times especially they shall appear in greater numbers and, more rapid succession.

Therefore we should observe here why the Lord spake these words, and for what reasons it was and still is necessary to tell and know these things beforehand: namely, in the first place, that the Church might know that such signs and the punishments following them, are not by mere chance, as the wicked world thinks; but that God has threatened them as a punishment for contempt and for all other sins, and that they are also sent as a sure indication of God's great anger and displeasure against sin, especially as they are to increase more and more in the last times, so that we may thereby be warned of the final and utter destruction of the world, since it will not forsake its sins, but in the midst of punishments continues to despise God and remain impenitent, and thus also in the end, at its destruction, will be found so, on which account God's anger and punishments will remain over it forever. Secondly, we must know that the Church of God on earth must also suffer amidst these punishments, nay, is perhaps more oppressed by them than others, because she also yet has sins. For God desires especially that this be known in His Church, how great and terrible is His anger against sin, in order that she may live before Him in fear and humility, and sigh all the more after grace. In the third place, we should also hold fast this consolation, that God will not therefore cast away His Church and those who turn to Him, although He suffers them while on earth to be brought under all manner of great tribulation, and even though they must endure more anguish than other people; nor is it His will that they should despair of His help, and think that God will suffer them to go down and perish with the wicked amid the punishments and signs of His anger; but He allows this to befall them, to exhort every one to repentance and conversion, and especially to give those who turn to Him by true repentance, faith and amendment of life, an opportunity to exercise their faith, to call upon Him, and confidently to expect help from Him in the midst of their tribulation and under the cross. Even as He also frequently, both in other places and in this gospel lesson, admonishes us to pray and call upon Him, and promises

mitigation of the punishments and help from God, and also assures His Church, that she shall be preserved to the end of the world, even to eternal life.

Of the signs Christ says, in the first place, that there shall be terrible signs in the sun, moon and the whole heavens, and other creatures also in the water and the sea, which, as I think, are not to be referred to a particular time, as though they should all take place within a short time before the last day, and be seen only by those who live to see that day; but He speaks in common of all kinds of signs which may happen at any time in all parts of the world, before the end, of which, although some, as eclipses of the sun and moon, are considered natural, and are of such a nature that, by a certain knowledge of the courses of the heavenly bodies, it can be told beforehand when they will happen, yet there are also many others which are unusual, and not known beforehand, which come unexpectedly and suddenly, in spite of all mathematics; like that eclipse of the sun when Christ was crucified, which did not happen at that time when such eclipses take place by the usual course of nature. For science teaches us that it must take place at the time of the new moon, when both, sun and moon, occupy one position in the heavens, and are so near together that the moon comes before the sun and covers it, so that it cannot shine, and of course it could happen at no other time. Therefore, if any eclipse of the sun happens, at the time of the full moon, or one of the quarters of the moon, as at the time of Christ's passion, it does not take place naturally, but is an especial sign. But whether such and other signs in the heavens appear in the natural order of things or not, they are still signs, and God intends that they should signify something to the world, as the eclipses of the sun and moon always do, of which we have seen many and great ones, especially in these last years, and often several in one year. Thus, especially if the end should be near, there may soon be many strange, new and unusual signs. As in the last twenty or thirty years many strange appearances and signs have been seen here and there, as many strange rainbows and other signs, the cross, two or three suns, shooting stars, comets following each other, fiery heavens, the sun blood-red several days in succession, besides that which may yet daily happen. These would appear terrible if they were seen at one time, or together, or if they were described and noticed at once; but since they happen singly and one after the other, we soon forget them when they are past, and have become accustomed to them.

Secondly, He speaks of other signs which are to happen below in the air, in the sea and on the earth. Such are strange and terrible thunderstorms, great and dreadful roaring and disturbance of winds, which storm and rage in an unusual manner, as if everything were to be destroyed. It has happened in different places, that the land together with the people were drowned or sunk, as has occurred within our recollection. Thus during several years we have heard of great earthquakes, of the sinking of several places in Italy, Sicily, and other places by the sea, of which Christ also speaks especially in other passages. All these are to be indications and signs that the world must soon come to an end and be destroyed. As in the case of a man who is to die: he must first begin to complain, to lie sick of a fever or pestilence; he evidently declines and falls away, until his color is that of death, his lips are livid, his eyes are sunken, etc. These are to him signs that he is near his end. Thus also the world must, as it were, first get sick, and groan and creak before it breaks and goes down.

In the third place He also mentions some signs which shall happen to men, and mentions especially that men's hearts shall fail them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth. This shall follow after and in addition to the other signs. For such signs in heaven and in the air and water will not pass by without results, but will bring with them terrible plagues and changes in the world, of which they shall be signs. As Christ also explains this especially in Matt. 24. that "nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines and pestilences and earthquakes," etc. All these are to prevail with great power before the last times, and all are to be signs that God will finally punish the world, nay, subvert it altogether, that there shall be seen great devastation of kingdoms and lands, and finally fearful division and destruction of governments, and of nearly all virtue, honor and discipline, and everything shall be full of fearful tyranny, barbarism, unfaithfulness, treachery, and all manner of vice, unhindered and unpunished; as the Savior also says, that as love has waxed cold, iniquity will abound, so that every one will have to say, it is not possible that the world will long exist thus, as we see these things at this time to such a degree, that no improvement can be hoped for. All this is accompanied by those signs which Christ says shall happen to men, viz, "men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." For when those people who are not altogether abandoned, and especially those who are still

upright, honorable, good-hearted, wise and sensible people shall see such wretchedness and terrible things on earth, and everything becoming so bad, and when extreme want and severe punishments, as war and destruction, shall befall them, and they think of these things which are still beyond and must yet follow, they will not be able to bear it all, and the hearts of many will fail them for fear, as we have often seen and still see, that many people in such extremity are so cast down by distress and sorrow, that on account of it they die, or their lives are shortened. And this that He says, “Men shall fear,” I regard as a chief point, which we have especially also seen and experienced under the papacy, especially those people who wished to be pious, and have lived a strictly spiritual life. What misery, what anxiety and torture of consciences has been caused by doctrines and commandments of men, as Christ also speaks of this in Matt. 24. among the plagues of the last time in the Church, and says that many false teachers shall arise, who shall also do great signs and wonders and deceive many, and, if it were possible, even the very elect.

We who are now old, and who were formerly buried in the darkness of the papacy, know how good, pious hearts were terrified and driven to the verge of despair by the pope’s command, who through his monks laid innumerable snares for consciences, which they called *casus canscientiae*, with which they filled great books, setting forth how great a mortal sin it is not to keep such commands; as when a monk did not at all times strictly and in every respect keep and observe his adopted rule and order, or when merely through forgetfulness he did not put his cowl on according to rule, or a priest did not read his prayers, which they call *horas*, or, when he was to celebrate mass, allowed himself to take a drop or two of water, or when one did not make as full a confession of each and every sin, or did not fast as strictly as he should, and thus went to the Sacrament, or did not render the imposed satisfaction, etc. With such things timid and fearful consciences were so terrified that no one knew how to help them; and even when, with the greatest diligence, they had done all that they possibly could do, they could still not be satisfied, because they thought they had not done enough. So they ran hither and thither, here to this saint, there to another, to Rome, to St. James at *Compostel*, some unprotected and barefoot, others also in their armor, and here and there on new pilgrimages, especially to places where the Virgin Mary (as the shameless monks and priests devised) would be gracious, do wonders, etc., until it came so far that the common

people, nay even princes and lords, persuaded by the monks, had themselves enrolled in their orders when dead, and buried in a monk's cap. And thus, without ceasing, they tortured their poor consciences with their works, that I do not believe there ever could have been greater distress and anguish; as I myself have seen many, who could not endure such dread and fear of the terrible judgment of God, and on account of it gave themselves up to despair. The reason of all this was that the doctrine of the gospel and the true consolation in Christ had become darkened in the pulpits, nay gone out altogether, and no one knew anything about the doctrine of faith, through which forgiveness of sins is promised us in the Scriptures, not on account of our merit, but for Christ's sake, through grace. The pope's sermons had brought it so far that we feared Christ almost as death, because they showed in Him no grace nor consolation, but represented Him as an angry, terrible Judge, before whom no man could find grace, unless he had enough holiness or good works of his own, or intercessions of the Virgin Mary or other saints, to cover up all his sins. For I also was one of those who called upon the Virgin Mary, that she might be our mediator, and reconcile us with that strict Judge, Christ; as also in all churches scarcely anything else but such idolatry (which now they pretend to have forgotten, as though they had never had any error nor idolatry) was publicly taught, read and sung. Everywhere the prayer for the intercession of Mary was first, and they had special *horas*, which they observed and sung to Mary seven times a day, in which they always repeated especially this verse, which they also repeated to the people on their death bed, and called it into their ears as they were giving up the ghost: *Maria, mater gratiae, Tu nos ab hoste protege, In horo mortis suscipe!*¹ Everywhere the burden of all the prayers and sighs, even of the holy monks, was this: Help, thou dear mother of God, and intercede for us against the severe judgment of thy Son, else our souls have no comfort, nor help, nor refuge. Now this was a terrible dread and anguish, which only false doctrine begets and which must follow if we would be pious, and yet not have the true knowledge of the doctrine of the gospel. But now, thanks be to God, since the pure doctrine and consolation in Christ shines again, such anguish is past, but alas too soon forgotten. For the young people, who now grow up, know nothing of it. And the Papists themselves have received so much strength from our doctrine, that they have got rid of such anguish and fear, and are now good fellows, belonging to those who regard neither God's grace and consolation, nor the terrible

signs of the last day and the judgment. For these were surely terrible signs, that such anguish and distress were in the Church, and we should not so soon forget them. For although, as I hope, they are mostly past, they may happen again, if the world will not be truly thankful for the gospel, but will strive, as the Papists are now doing, again to darken and suppress the Word of God, that there may again be greater distress.

Now those, in whom such anguish and terror were found, were generally not ungodly and abandoned, but good-hearted, pious, God-fearing people, and still are, so that those are not signs of condemnation; for it is a good sign that such hearts do not despise God's anger, but heed the warning of the future judgment, and sigh after such consolation and deliverance. And we may well believe that many of them are wonderfully preserved in their last hour, who have again laid hold upon Christ, and comforted themselves in His sufferings and death; but since they are so weak, timid and uninstructed, they cannot endure all these terrors. So we said above that such terror and misery in the world mostly fall upon the Church and cause her anguish, and that some, -though they are not overcome by it so as to despair of Christ altogether, are still very much weakened and almost consumed by such burdens. Therefore, although they must bear and feel such signs, they are sent as a terror, not to them, but to the wicked, who nevertheless are so hardened and secure, that they care nothing for such divine threats and signs, but despise them. They imagine that as God does not follow them up immediately with His wrath and turn the whole world upside down, but grants them a little time, there is no particular danger. And if we tell them much about signs, and they themselves see today this, tomorrow something else, they let it pass by, and say: Such signs happened formerly, and the last day has not come yet. Therefore also the Lord lets such ungodly people go, and further preaches of His coming for the consolation of Christians. For if the world can despise the terrible signs and punishments which it sees, it will pay still less heed to this preaching and threatening, but it will serve to leave many without excuse, and their condemnation will be rendered all the greater by their own conscience. But since they will not believe when it is preached to them, it will come to this, that they must see and feel, when the day of judgment shall suddenly come upon them, as Christ says: "Then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

This will be a splendor and glory different from that of all emperors and kings on earth, of which they would not before have been persuaded, although He should incessantly have threatened with signs every day. For then the whole air shall be filled with elect angels and sainted men, everywhere hovering in the clouds around this Lord, they shall be brighter than the sun, and He, the Lord, and all the saints with Him, will pass sentence upon the damned who will stand trembling below on the earth with the devil, and have their punishment with everlasting destruction from the presence of the glory of the Son of God, whom they would not acknowledge, and whose word they despised, as St. Paul says 2. Thess., chap. 1. But that to the Christians, who believe and wait for such signs and the coming of our Lord unto judgment, all this happens for comfort and salvation, the Savior says further: “When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.”

This is a very precious consolation, with which Christ would kindly comfort His Christians on earth, who at all events suffer much and many kinds of anguish and trouble, and terror on account of the signs of the final judgment besides. He explains the signs in quite a different way for them, and would have them look upon them otherwise than they are naturally looked upon. For although it is true that God shows His Church such signs, and lets them see and feel the punishments, that they may, in the first place, thereby be admonished to repentance, that is, that they may not, like others, despise His anger; in the second place that they may know that in this life they must always be under the cross and tribulation, in order that they may hate sin, think upon and wait for another life, where all evil shall cease, and that in such tribulation they may call upon and sigh to their Savior for deliverance; yet all these signs shall serve also to comfort the Church of God, that those who are in the Church may perceive and know that God therewith threatens the wicked world, and the judgment will surely follow, when the wicked shall receive eternal pain and torment, but they shall be delivered through their Savior, the Son of God, and enter into eternal joy. Wherefore, under the terrible image of the signs and tribulation which came upon earth, they are to await the coming of the Son of God, full of comfort and joy. Therefore He gives them an interpretation of these signs which is full of comfort. I know well, He says, that such signs will terrify you and make you afraid, so that it shall seem as though I had altogether forgotten

you and my Church, and as though I would let you perish together with the world; but I say unto you, when you see such signs, and they would terrify you, that, as my Christians, you shall prepare yourselves for my coming, by waiting for it full of comfort and joy, lifting up your heads, as those who heartily desire my appearing. And withal you shall know this, that, when the signs appear most terrible, and the distress on earth is greatest, then I am nearest to you, and your redemption is at hand. Therefore also, under this dreadful appearance, you all are to see nothing but your redemption. Let the others be frightened and fear, who know of no redemption and care nothing for me; but you who believe in me, who have suffered for my sake, and live and die in this faith and confession, you have no wrath and punishment to look for, but shall find your salvation and joyful deliverance, which you have so long desired and prayed for, when you asked that my kingdom might come to you, and that you might be free from sin, and delivered from all evil. Therefore, although the signs shall appear fearful and terrible to you, when, the sun and moon shall be changed, all creatures are mingled in confusion, and finally the world itself is full of fire, yet you shall not judge by such appearance, but know that this indicates something different, nay, the very opposite to you, from what it does to the ungodly world, which, together with its prince, the devil, persecutes you, and does not fear the future judgment. These signs will be and bring to them what they seem, and indicate to the world by their terrible appearance that the day of judgment shall be to them a day of eternal mourning, weeping and gnashing of teeth, nay of their damnation and hell, which they will not believe nor regard until they experience it. But to you, whom this dreadful scene now terrifies, it shall show and bring nothing but deliverance, and the day of my appearing shall be a day of eternal joy and salvation.

For I know that you need such redemption, and in order that you may have it, I must come thus and make an end of the world; for if I am to deliver you, I must first attack those who hold you captive and hinder your redemption. Therefore as a Christian, you must have such thoughts about the signs of the last day, as if you were lying captive among enemies and murderers in a high tower, and your pious ruler should come and begin to besiege the tower with great power, so that everything should begin to fall around you; you would not be afraid of the noise and cannonading, but would much more rejoice, if you knew it was for your redemption. Thus you should do here too, says Christ. Let it not terrify you that the world

must bend and squirm; this is not intended for you, but for those against whom you have cried out.

Therefore look upon this advent as the appearing of your redemption; for I come not to cast you into hell, but to deliver you from the injurious, sick, infirm, wicked world, to separate you from the devil and his murderous servants, and to place you among the angels, where you shall no more suffer, but live in eternal glory.

Such comfort is also imparted in the beautiful parable of the budding trees, which He gives them that they may all the better appropriate to themselves this consolation. In spring, He says, when winter ceases and the whole earth becomes new; when the cold departs and the warmth takes its place; when the dry trees become green and blossom again, tell me, how does all this begin? Is it not true that buds first begin to swell, then to open? Then every one says that winter is past and summer will soon be here. Let this parable be your teacher, and the trees in the field your book, that you may learn to know how to await the last day. For God has written this article of the last day and resurrection of the dead not only in books, but also in trees and other creatures. As summer surely will follow when the sap rises in the trees, and they put forth leaves; so when the earth shall quake, the heavens tremble, and the sun and moon look dark and gloomy, then be no more afraid than you are when the young leaves appear and summer is about to come. Such signs shall be to you like the sap and leaflets on the trees, that you may with joy look for the eternal summer, and know that there shall now be an end of your distress and anguish. For this wretched life on earth is like the unfruitful winter when everything dries up, dies and decays. But it shall then have an end, and the beautiful, eternal summer shall come, namely, the kingdom of God, by which the kingdom of the devil shall be destroyed, on account of which you have had to suffer so much in this world. For in this world you must live among ungodly, wicked, false, penurious people, who blaspheme and slander the gospel, and seek to bring about all manner of misfortune. This you must see and hear every day, and may expect it to become still worse. From this I will redeem you by my coming, that you may no more see nor suffer such things.

Even as Peter says of pious Lot, who in his day had to live among the bad people of Sodom. These caused him all manner of sorrow by their disgraceful life, and tormented his just soul from day to day by their

unrighteous works, and by sins which may not be mentioned, which he had to see and hear with innocent eyes and ears, until they became too great, and God could have no more patience. Then two angels came and led pious Lot out of the city. No doubt it was also a terrible sight for him to see how the heavens became black, how it lightened and thundered around him, how the clouds opened and began to rain down fire and brimstone, and how the earth was opened and everything sank away from his view. That Lot should not have been surprised at this, is impossible; but he had this consolation, that this terrible manifestation was not on his account, or meant for him, but for the Sodomites, who were wicked, presumptuous fellows, and would not amend. They must not only be surprised at this fiery rain, but also perish in it and go down to the bottomless pit. But to pious Lot it was like a beautiful tree which begins to put out leaves and look green, as an indication of summer. For he sees in it God's help and gracious deliverance from the ungodly.

Thus also will it be with us at the last day, should we live to see it. It will be terrible to behold when the heavens and the earth begin to be wrapped in flame; but a Christian must not look at the appearance, but hear how Christ explains it; namely, that it is a beautiful blossom, a young, thrifty branch, so that, although nature may be terrified at this dreadful sight, the heart may nevertheless cleave to the word, strengthen itself against the external appearance and say: Well, be not afraid, since it neither is, nor means anything injurious, but only that my Redeemer and redemption are near at hand. So now be welcome to me, God, my dear Lord Jesus, and come, as I have my lifelong often prayed that Thy kingdom might come, and the kingdom of the devil at last have an end. Whoever can thus receive the Lord Jesus, will in a moment be translated to eternal glory, where he shall shine as the sun.

In this way our dear Lord Jesus teaches us rightly to regard the last day, that we may know what it is to us, and to what end we are to wait and look for its coming. The pope preaches concerning Christ that He is a terrible Judge, whose wrath we must appease with our good works; likewise that we must call upon the saints and enjoy their intercession, if we would not be damned. For thus they have everywhere painted Christ in the papacy, that He will come to judgment with a sword and rod in His mouth, both of which indicate wrath. But since Mary and John the Baptist stand at His side,

they have sought their intercession and that of other saints, as pious Father Bernard also imagines that if Mother Mary shows her son her breasts, He cannot deny her anything. This is a sure indication that they did not rightly understand these words of our Lord, and thus the true knowledge of Christ was darkened; namely, that He is our Savior, Reconciler, Intercessor, Mediator, ordained of God, for whose sake we are to find grace and mercy with God, and that He will come, as He says in this gospel, not to terrify nor condemn those who flee to Him, but to comfort, redeem, save and bless them, if in true faith and a holy life we look forward full of consolation to this blessed day. But He will judge and punish those who have not believed in Him, and who have mocked and troubled His Christians on earth. This, He says, believe firmly, and doubt not, and rejoice at my advent, for it shall be for your good, that you shall be delivered from sin, the devil, death and the world, and saved forever through me.

But there is one thing more at which timid consciences are much troubled. For our Lord says the last day shall come suddenly, that it shall happen to men as to a little bird of the forest, which flies about in the morning, is hungry, hunts its food, hopes it will find it as hitherto, finds it, sits down and is full of joy; but in an instant, before it knows it, the net falls over it, and it is caught and killed. Pious, God-fearing men, take this to heart, and since they learn from their daily experience how soon man may fall, they are timid and fearful. For they think, who knows how this day may find you? Perhaps it may come at the time when you are least prepared, least expecting it, and lying in this or that sin; so it may happen that this day of rejoicing will be to you a day of everlasting sorrow. But in this case the Lord would not leave us without comfort, and teaches His Christians how to defend themselves against this anxiety and says: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

Now this is also a very necessary lesson, which we should always keep in our hearts. The Lord does not forbid eating and drinking; nor does He tell us, like the pope, to let everything lie, and go into a cloister and become

spiritual. No, eat and drink; this God allows: seek after your food too, for therefore has God commanded labor. But of this beware, lest at any time your hearts be so overcharged with all these things, that you forget my advent; but watch, that is, wait every hour and moment, live in the fear of God, and with a good conscience. Let this be the first. After this, pray also, that you may escape all affliction and distress, and be deemed worthy to stand before the Son of man; as this is also summed up beautifully in the last two petitions of the Lord's prayer: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." If you do this there will be no danger; then the last day may find you at table or in bed, in church or the market place, waking or sleeping, it will be to you a day of salvation. For it will find you in the fear of God and under His protection.

But here we must also know this, that we cannot pray to God nor call upon Him in a proper manner, if we are not willing to forsake those sins of which we know, and to amend our lives. Therefore true repentance belongs to an acceptable prayer; I say, true repentance, and that we beware of sins against our conscience, that is, that we do not knowingly and designedly follow an evil inclination, against God's command; but trusting in God's goodness, pray in the name of the Lord Jesus, that He would keep you in His fear, enable you, through His Holy Spirit, to avoid sin, and strengthen you in the true faith unto the end, that you may await this blessed day with joy, and receive the Lord Jesus as your Redeemer with heartfelt confidence. Such prayer is heard, through Christ; of this there is no doubt. And in these words: "That you may be deemed worthy to escape," etc. God gives us the consolation, that in the case of those who are converted to Him, and in their conversion call upon Him in true faith, He will alleviate and to some extent remove those punishments and tribulations which shall befall the rest of mankind, in order that the Church may not perish in this distress, and the pious not give way to sadness, but may be lifted up by the consolation that God will help and sustain His Church unto the end. For although God is really angry on account of sin, and punishes it terribly, nevertheless in this life He visits punishment and tribulation upon men especially to this end, that they may thereby be admonished to repentance, and be converted to Him, and thus, although they have well deserved His just wrath, they may still find mercy, as St. Paul says, 1 Cor. 11:32: "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." Therefore our Savior also gives us this admonition, that in this last great

tribulation and distress of the Church we should, through prayer, turn to Him as our refuge, and know that God will then cease from His anger, in order that His Church may not perish, but be sustained through all the punishments and in the destruction of the world, and finally be perfectly redeemed. And, according to this admonition and promise, this is to be a daily exercise of faith and prayer, that they may truly comfort themselves with the assurance that God will not consume them in His wrath, but that even in wrath He will remember mercy. Therefore we should follow this advice and doctrine, and prepare ourselves properly for this gracious day of redemption. May our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ grant this to all of us! Amen.

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1. Mary, mother of grace, protect us against the enemy; receive us in the hour of death!↵

Third Sunday In Advent. Matt. 11:2-10.

Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee. – Matt. 11:2-10.

In this gospel there are two points demanding our notice; first, that John sends his disciples out of prison unto Christ, to hear Him and see His miracles, and receive Him as the true Messiah or Christ. This should encourage us also willingly to hear the words of our dear Lord Jesus, and to regard it as the greatest treasure, in which indeed is our salvation. The other point is, that our Savior not only so highly praises John the Baptist, as a pattern for the preachers, since he so faithfully performed the duties of his office that, even when he was in prison and could not any more preach himself, he sent his disciples to Christ, but also rebukes the unbelief of the Jews, because they so lightly esteemed this preacher, and paid no heed to his words. This should serve as a warning to us, not to despise God's word, but willingly to hear it and be bettered thereby.

The first, that we should hear the word of Christ diligently, is indicated by this that John, when he was already in prison, as soon as he heard of the wonderful works of Christ, sent his disciples to Him with the command that they should ask Him: “Whether He were the one that should come,” concerning whom Moses and all the other prophets had written so much, and concerning whom there should be so much preached in the New Testament? That is, whether He were the promised Christ, concerning whom it was written that the Jews’ kingdom and Moses’ doctrine should continue until His coming, after which Moses’ doctrine and worship should cease, and a new doctrine and worship be established, not only among the Jews, but also among the heathens in the whole world, as this had been clearly and unequivocally prophesied. Therefore, since soon after John’s imprisonment it had commenced, and the Lord Jesus Himself had begun to preach concerning eternal life and the kingdom of God, John now wishes to direct his disciples to the Lord Himself; sends them therefore to Christ, that with their eyes they might see the miracles, and with their ears hear that doctrine proclaimed, concerning which the prophets had so long foretold that Christ would thus bring them upon earth and reveal Himself. Therefore this sending is nothing else than as if John would say: It is true I myself know that He is the very Christ, as I have hitherto preached concerning Him, but the people do not believe it yet, and since I am now in prison, and must quit preaching, they would no more regard my testimony concerning Him. Therefore that you may be assured of this, and my preaching be not in vain in you, go to Him yourselves now, and hear it from His own lips, in order that henceforth you may separate yourselves from me and all Jewry, and cling alone to this Man, upon whom depends everything pertaining to your and the whole world’s salvation. This is the final purpose of this message of John to Christ, that his disciples should themselves see and hear Him, learn to know Him, and thus believe in Him and be saved.

Well, what does Christ say to this message? He says neither Yes nor No, when they ask Him whether He were the one, but refers them to the public testimony of His works and says: Here you see, hear and comprehend that I am He; for just as Isaiah and other prophets have foretold that Christ should heal the lame, give the blind their sight, etc., thus you see it now before your eyes, and need no further instruction nor answer, if you will but rightly receive this. This is now a precious, beautiful sermon concerning Christ, embracing everything which can be preached concerning Him, what kind of

a King He is and what kind of a kingdom He has; namely, a kingdom to which the blind, lame, leprous, deaf, dead people and especially poor sinners, and all who are wretched, needy and nothing, belong, and in which they find comfort and help.

We should diligently mark this sermon concerning Christ and His kingdom, and always let it be heard among us that Christ has such a kingdom, and is such a King, and is willing to help wretched, poor people, in body and soul, when the whole world and all that is in it can afford no help. For such a skillful Doctor never came before, who could restore the blind to sight, cleanse the lepers, etc., just as there never was a preacher who could have preached the gospel to the poor, that is, who could truly comfort sad, wretched, anguished consciences, and cause timid hearts, filled with sadness and sorrow, to rejoice and be glad.

Moses is indeed the greatest preacher, having himself received the Ten Commandments from God, for I do not speak now of other Jewish laws. God evidently testified that this is His eternal, unchangeable will, which He also otherwise plants into men's hearts, that we should be obedient unto Him according to these doctrines and commandments. And nothing higher can be preached respecting the doings and life of all creatures than this, that we love God above all things, etc. But however good and precious such preacher is, nevertheless he cannot comfort one poor sinner with his (i. e. the law's) preaching. Nay, he does the contrary; for all his preaching amounts to this: Thou shalt and must keep the law, or be damned. Here then begins distress; for those who are conscious of their sins and would like to be delivered from them, embitter their lives, use all possible diligence to keep the law, but cannot be satisfied, nor by such means obtain a joyful heart and conscience. For thus also the saints of the Old Testament complain, who are tired of Moses' government, who oppresses them through the law with an intolerable burden (as St. Paul says, Acts 15), and have an earnest longing after the kingdom of grace promised in Christ; as for instance Psalm 14: "Oh, that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of His people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad." And Psalm 102: "Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favor her is come." Again, the hypocrites think that if they externally keep the law, they need think neither of the gospel nor of Christ; there is no fear, they think; God must take them

into heaven on account of their fasting, prayers and almsgiving. These are self-secure, strange spirits, who care nothing for God nor His grace.

Now it is true, we must have the preaching of Moses, in order that we may admonish and incite the people to a proper discipline and conversation, just as in civil government we must have jailors and hangmen to keep the people in fear and subjection, and to punish rude, lawless fellows, who will not submit to such external discipline, but live in adultery, steal, are covetous, etc., etc.? In addition to this the Ten Commandments must also be retained in the Church for the sake of those who are already holy and are Christians, in order that they may know what is a truly godly life and what are good works which they are to do, and that now since they are turned unto God, justified by faith in Christ, and God's children, they may also begin to live in obedience towards God. But when that hour comes, when we are to stand in the anguish of death and the struggle of conscience against the terrors of divine wrath and hell, and are to have comfort and gain the victory, tell me, what will the law of Moses help you then, even though you have diligently kept it and led a holy life according to it? Is it not true that you must confess and say: My dear heavenly Father, although I have been no adulterer, thief nor murderer, yet I am unclean and full of sins before Thee; therefore I desire and pray Thee, that Thou wouldst be gracious and merciful unto me, else, with all my good works, I must despair, as David also says, Psalm 143: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant; for in Thy sight shall no living man be justified." And Psalm 130: "If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

Bearing upon this we read a story in the Lives of the Fathers: An old hermit stood nearly three whole days in one place, and continually lifted his eyes towards heaven, sighed and complained. But when his disciples asked him what ailed him, he answered: O, I am really afraid of death. Then his disciples related what a strict life he had always led, how diligently he had observed the divine commandments, thinking they would thus comfort him. But he said: I tell you I am in great fear; I have, as you say, diligently observed God's law, yet I cannot drive away this fear; for I know that God's judgments are very different from man's judgments. Behold, this man was brought to perceive that when our last hour comes, and we must appear before God and His judgment, and begin to see that God's judgment is

searching, earnest and severe, then our holiness and good works will not stand, nor can we be justified through them.

Therefore, although we should preach the law and constantly practice good works, and live according to God's law always; yet when we are to die, we must say like this old father: Oh God, who will now help? This is also one of those distressed ones of whom it is here written, but he does not know to what he shall hold fast. For he does not know what the Lord here says: "The poor have the gospel preached to them." He sees and has nothing more yet than the law; this leaves him with a troubled conscience, in fear and anguish, and cannot comfort him. But the gospel is a message concerning Christ, which says to the sinner: My son, be of good cheer and joyful, be not afraid; for you must know that Christ has commanded to announce His grace to the poor, i.e. the distressed and troubled hearts; He places His purity, which is divine and eternal, before you, washes away your sins, reconciles you to God, and has purchased for and offers to you forgiveness of sins and eternal life through His sacrifice and death. He commands this grace to be offered to you through His word; therefore doubt not; for, as you hear, if you but believe it, so it shall certainly be to you.

Therefore Christ and the prophets very properly call this announcement a gospel, that is, a gracious, comforting, blessed doctrine or ministry; just as if a rich man should promise a poor beggar a thousand dollars: this would be to him a gospel, a joyful message, which he would gladly hear and heartily rejoice over. But what are money and goods compared with this comforting and gracious announcement that Christ has mercy upon the distressed, and is such a King as is willing to help poor sinners, who are captive under the law, to eternal life and righteousness. This, He says here, is my kingdom, which differs much from earthly kingdoms. For here they help the strong and honor the pious, and, on the other hand, condemn and punish the wicked; they govern strictly and with the edge of the sword, cut and strike everywhere around them, and cannot, nor should they, tolerate any vice or immorality. Here they must everywhere be hangmen, scourges, sword, water, fire, that they may be able to practice the office of punishing. But this kingdom of Christ has nothing to do with strong, holy, innocent men, but with poor, weak, wretched sinners, condemned by the law, as Christ here says: "The blind receive their sight, the dead are raised up," etc. Now, to raise the dead is a great miracle, but this miracle is far greater and

more glorious, and yet does not seem so: God so loved the world that He gave His Son, whom He had set apart from eternity to be a King of the poor and the sinners, and to preach to them the gospel. Of such a King and gospel Moses and the law do not preach; for their judgment is directly thus: Whoever is a sinner belongs under the power of the devil and death; but whoever would be in the kingdom of God must be holy and without sin. And it is true. For Moses' kingdom is also the kingdom of our Lord God, and the doctrine which he preaches is also God's word; just as the temporal government may also be called the kingdom of God; for it is His will that we should live obediently under this also. But this kingdom is only on the left hand, where He places father, mother, emperor, king, judge, hangman, and commits the government unto them, or commands and makes known through His ministers, angels or men, what we are to do.

But His right kingdom, in which He Himself rules and works, is where the gospel is preached to the poor, in which thou learnest, when thy own piety cannot stand before Him nor help thee, to say: Lord, I have done what I could, have been obedient to and faithfully served my parents and superiors, have faithfully instructed my house, children and servants, and governed them as well as I could, have not done my neighbor any evil, have not stolen, not committed adultery, etc.; but all this does not help me before Thy judgment, nor does it bring me to Thy kingdom; for I am not therefore without sin before Thee, and this my obedience was very imperfect, and besides there is still much impurity in me. Yet, dear Lord, I will not despair on that account, for I once heard from Thy gospel that Thy Son, my dear Lord Jesus Christ, did six kinds of miracles. Among these this is mentioned also, that the poor have the gospel preached to them, that is, that He was ordained of Thee, heavenly Father, to comfort distressed, terrified hearts. Of this message I will also avail myself; for it belongs to me, since I am so poor and wretched, and cannot find any help in me nor in the whole world besides.

Thus the prophet Isaiah prophesies concerning Christ in the fiftieth chapter, where He, the Lord Jesus Himself, says: "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned," that is, God hath put His word upon my tongue, and hath commanded me to preach it, so that I know how to speak to the weary, that is, rightly to comfort timid consciences. The Evangelist here explains this and says (as is also said in Is. 60): "Christ preaches the

gospel to the poor.” For therefore and to this end He is made a King; namely, that He should evangelize, that is, comfort and strengthen poor, timid, afflicted hearts; wherefore His kingdom is also called, and is a kingdom of comfort and help, in which they are no more to terrify the timid, nor let them remain in anguish, but to deliver them through true, divine comfort, and make them joyful again. This is not, and cannot be done by the preaching of the law, but only through this preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the joyful, good news, that through Him our sins are taken away, and that through His sufferings and death we are redeemed from eternal death. This preaching belongs to the poor, says the Lord; to them I will go; for I cannot go to the great saints, who do not want to be sinners, have no need of my gospel, nay persecute it, call it heresy, and say that through it good works are forbidden and Moses and the law spoken against.

Therefore He says further: “Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.” Yes, truly blessed. For the whole world is offended in this King and His gospel, in which every one ought, of right, to rejoice; as we see in the gospel history that the Pharisees, Scribes, High Priests, Priests, Levites, and all who were high and great, look upon and condemn Christ as a deceiver, and His doctrine as heresy. He never can preach rightly for them; they always think that He turns things around and gets them wrong; that He would cast the pious and righteous (as He indeed does) into hell, and not suffer them in His kingdom; but would exalt the sinners to heaven: even as the Papists nowadays also accuse us, saying: Is this the right kind of preaching, that you attach no importance at all to good works, and open heaven for wicked fellows? Such detraction our Savior also had to suffer among the Jews. But here it is written: “Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.” Now, if you would rightly hear Christ, receive His word, and come unto His kingdom, you would experience that the gospel does not forbid good works, as the Papists lie about us; but it teaches and admonishes Christians to do good works, to be earnestly concerned not to do anything against God’s word and their conscience lets civil government, emperors and kings remain, and lets the hangman use the sword, scourge, and other things that belong to discipline. Why then are you offended in the holy gospel, and slander it, as though it taught that we should do nothing good? The gospel does not condemn nor forbid good works, but this it does forbid, namely, to build upon and trust in our life and good works when we

die and are about to enter into another life, where we need help and comfort against sin and eternal death; and it teaches that we are to look unto the Lord Jesus, with firm confidence to rely upon His work and merit, that through Him we shall find grace and eternal salvation in that life.

For to this very end God has given us such a body, with so many useful members, that we should not be idle on earth, but walk with our feet, grasp with our hands, speak with our mouth, see with our eyes, etc. And since man lives and has the use of his members, he must do something, and can just as little be without works as he can live without constant breath, or the pulsation of the heart. But with regard to such works and to our whole life, God's law demands that they should all be done in obedience to Him and according to His will. This the gospel not only permits, but also confirms, and teaches that we should do it with all diligence. But when man is to leave this world and appear before the judgment of God, then the gospel bids you look for another comfort, upon which you can surely ground and rest your firm hope of eternal life.

Therefore if you have lived well here, that is, right and good, thank God for it; but in dying do not depend upon this, as though God must give you heaven on this account; but hold fast to this King, Christ Jesus, who alone, as the Evangelist announces, shall have this office, to give the blind their sight, to make the lame walk, to cleanse the lepers, to give the deaf their hearing, to raise the dead, and to preach to the poor disconsolate the gospel, that is, to show and give to them eternal consolation, life, joy and salvation. To this end His Father sent Him, not that He should hang us or break us on the wheel because of our sins, but that He should comfort our poor consciences, and help them forever.

But those who do not regard Him thus, nor expect such grace from Him, but are offended in Him and His doctrine, and despise Him as the Jews did and the hypocrites do nowadays, He will restrain in His own time. And this is one cause of offense which the world finds in the doctrine of Christ, that it does not want to depend on God's grace, but upon its own works and merit. Therefore it accuses the holy gospel with being a deceptive doctrine, which forbids good works and makes people dissolute and wild. Secondly, the world is offended in Christ because He is Himself so poor and needy. Again, as He Himself bears the cross and suffers Himself to be suspended on it, He also admonishes His Christians to take up their cross and follow

Him through all kinds of affliction and tribulation. The world is hostile to this and fears it, as we see when we confess the gospel, and are to venture and suffer something for its sake, that whole multitudes fall like worm-eaten fruit in summer. In the third place this is also an offense, if we pay more regard to our own heart and conscience, how we may happen to feel, than to the gospel of Christ; that is, if our own deeds and omissions concern us and trouble us more than the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, promised in the gospel, comforts us. This kind of offense is not so common as the first two for only true Christians are affected by it. But it distresses beyond measure; and were it not for the help and assistance of the Holy Spirit, not one of us could overcome such offense.

Thus the dear Lord Jesus is everywhere in the world a preacher who gives offense; as, soon after this gospel, He announces in still clearer terms that people will be offended at this doctrine, will despise it and persecute it. But what judgment awaits the world on this account, we learn from the sermon against the three cities, Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida, and also from the serious complaint of Christ against the Jews, when He says: John was a strict preacher, ate only wild honey and locusts, drank nothing but water, led a strictly ascetic life, but what did it avail? You accused him of having a devil. I, says He, eat and drink with every one, and am very friendly towards the people; but I am looked upon by you as a glutton and winebibber, associating with publicans and sinners. So no one can get along with these venomous serpents, the hypocrites and self-righteous. If one leads a free life and is friendly to every one, it will not do. If another leads a strict, ascetic life, it will not do either. What shall we do to please the miserable world? This perhaps would please her, if we would praise everything that she does, although she does nothing right.

Such offenses we must suffer. For if, when the Lord Jesus Himself preached, and miracles were as common as rain and snow, viz: that the blind receive their sight, the ears of the deaf are opened, the lame were made to walk, the lepers were cleansed and the dead were restored to life, all this availed nothing, but the word was still despised, and He, the Lord Jesus Himself, for its sake, was nailed to the cross, and the Apostles were driven from the land of Judea, and not able to remain in safety anywhere in the world: why should we complain much about it? Is it a matter of surprise that the world in our times despises the gospel and its true and faithful

preachers, and tramples them under foot? For our Lord Himself and the Apostles met with no different fate, who preached not only the word, but also' did great and noble miracles, the like of which we do not perform, but only preach the word which gives offense. Therefore we must become used to this and be content. It is and will remain a doctrine at which, not common people, but the most holy, pious, wise and powerful on earth take offense, as experience shows. But blessed are those who know and believe that it is God's word; they are healed, strengthened, and comforted against such offenses. But those who do not know it turn away from the word to their own righteousness, are puffed up on account of their own good works, and regard the gospel as a doctrine which gives offense and stir up strife. Thus the gospel becomes a stumbling-block and gives offense. And this, as already said, is the case with those who are regarded by the world as the greatest saints and wisest people. Therefore we may well utter our complaint against the blind world with the Lord Jesus, and say: "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented." If we preach the gospel, it avails nothing; if we preach the law, it avails nothing again. We can make the wicked world neither truly joyful, nor truly sorry; that is, they will not become sinners, nor allow themselves to be comforted against sin; they will be neither blind nor seeing, as is shown by the example of our opponents, the Papists, which we have before us.

Now this is the other part which is here to be observed, that the gospel is a doctrine and preaching for the poor, that is, for sorrowful, distressed consciences, who are sensible of their wretchedness and distress, and are affrighted and terrified at the wrath and judgments of God; not for the rich and full, who direct all their actions and thoughts to this, that they may have great honor and riches here, and to live in pleasure and luxury. Therefore it is a strange, wondrous doctrine in their ears, when the Lord says: "The poor have the gospel preached to them," which they do not desire to know nor learn, nay, which they regard as folly. They not only take offense at it, but persecute and slander it as heresy; as we see in the case of the pope and his spiritless cardinals, bishops, etc., also in the greater part of the greatest and mightiest temporal rulers and potentates who adhere to them, so that all who are pious, holy, great and powerful in the world, oppose the gospel.

Against such offense, as already said, our Lord warns His little flock, and says: "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." As though He should say: You see and experience, and will continue more and more to see and experience, that the world is offended at my word, and will for its sake persecute you who confess it. This I tell you before; and for this very reason that you may then be wise, and not let yourselves be led astray nor troubled, but think: The same thing happened to the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. Though He preached powerfully, and did so many great and notable miracles, it availed Him nothing. And that we might carefully remember this, and not suffer ourselves to be moved by the world's wisdom, glory, power and great numbers, He has faithfully warned and admonished us to hold fast to His word, when He says: "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me;" since it happened to our Lord Himself, that His own people, to whom He had been promised and sent as a Savior, were offended in Him. And since, although they saw the great and glorious miracles which He did before their eyes, they still would not be induced to believe His preaching and receive Him; nay since, on the contrary, they crucified Him, we may well keep silence and not complain, if we also are despised, laughed at and persecuted on account of the gospel. Such doctrine and warning against offense is highly necessary, especially in our time when almost every one slanders and takes offense at the dear gospel. Thus, from this sermon of Christ we derive an excellent doctrine, upon which our salvation and eternal life depend; namely, we learn how Christ is a King of grace and all comfort, who will encourage poor distressed consciences through His gospel, comfort them in the terror of sin, and help them to attain eternal life. For this is, properly speaking, His kingdom, which comes to us through the word, if we, when the burden of sin and death oppresses us, (for to such only it is preached), receive and believe the word. This comforts and assures us then to go on joyfully, building our hope on Christ, and with confidence to say: I believe in my dear Lord, who gives the blind their sight, makes the lame walk, cleanses the lepers, restores the deaf to their hearing and raises the dead. This word I have, and am therefore sure that He will not forsake me in my greatest necessities, but will lead me out of death and the kingdom of the devil into eternal life and the kingdom of heaven. For to this end He became man and appeared on earth, to comfort me, a poor miserable sinner, with His gospel, and forever to deliver me from sin and death.

Let this be said of the first part of the gospel lesson, in which Christ admonishes us highly to esteem the preaching of the gospel, as our highest comfort and grace, through which we come to His kingdom, and to avoid offenses which would turn or frighten us away from it. The other part also inculcates the same doctrine and admonition; for there we hear how highly the Savior praises John the Baptist, in view of his preaching and firmness and reproves the people because they did not regard nor believe his preaching, and says: "What went ye out into the wilderness to see?"

In the first place, no doubt, you went out to hear what there might be new, looked at him like a cow at a new gate, not caring much about him or his doctrine. For now that he is in prison you think his office and preaching are at an end, since he himself accomplished nothing further, and no Christ, of whom he spoke, appeared yet anywhere. Now, He says, you did not regard John as being anything else than a reed shaken by the wind, and still think that he was nothing different, and imagine that as your thoughts are, so John's and my preaching must be. But I say unto you, John is not a reed; do not look upon him as a preacher who will turn his word hither or thither, as you would have it, or who will preach to you a Messiah as your fancy paints Him; for you wish only a Messiah who will praise you as holy people, and you wait for a kingdom which is only worldly, in which you may have great honor, possessions, might and power. But there will be nothing of this; as John preached, so it shall be, and neither devil nor hell shall set it aside; for he stands with his doctrine and testimony like a wall, nay like a rock against all winds and storms; as you may see how he proves it in his imprisonment, when he sends his disciples to me. Therefore do not think that you will hear anything different from him, or see anything different in me from what he preached to you; and be no longer such a reed, if you do not wish to be shaken by every wind and storm of the devil. Do not imagine that this doctrine can be bent to suit your inclinations, and that he will preach or keep silence to suit the people, as you do; for you are such preachers as take handfuls of barley (as written Ezek. 13), or, like our new Papists, a rich benefice, and preach what the people like to hear. No, to speak or keep silence, as the people wish, is not the way in the kingdom of God; but to preach thus, as did St. John, who keeps on, holding fast to the same doctrine and testimony, sacrificing for it even his own life.

In the second place he is not clothed in soft raiment, like those who are at the courts of kings and princes, but is clothed in a coarse garment of camel's hair, and is bare-footed and bare-headed. These are his ornament and glory, with which he is content. Therefore he is not a preacher for those either who would like to take hold of the gospel where it is soft and mild, and when it serves their purpose, as those are who indeed receive the gospel when they can draw advantage from it and are enriched by it. Such is the case with the greater part of those among us, (nay even among the Papists themselves), the nobility, citizens and farmers. They know well how to use their freedom from all former papal tyranny and burdens to secure for themselves temporal goods, and appropriate to themselves whatever they can; but that they should, on the contrary, show their thankfulness to the gospel with one penny, and give something to their minister or the poor church, to this no one can induce them. But here it is said that John is not such a court-preacher, who would be clothed in soft raiment; that is, who preaches of a temporal kingdom, worldly goods, honor, power and good days, or shows a Christ who brings and gives such; but is clothed in coarse raiment, and uses plain and sharp language, for the sake of which we must suffer, and from which we must not expect luxury and an easy life.

The third part, concerning John's preaching and office, is, that Christ does not want him to be regarded as a prophet, but much higher and greater, so that no prophet can be compared with him in his office. For prophets have hitherto been persons whom God sent immediately to preach, with divine testimony that they had the Holy Ghost; but they all preached Christ as about to come, and, in general, a prophet is one who says or preaches about future things. Among these do not look for John the Baptist; but this is his name and office, as God calls him through Malachi, the angel, or fore-running messenger, of God, who shall prepare the way of the Lord, point to Him and say: Now you need no longer wait for Him: He is already here; only see that you receive Him. Thus, then, you are to regard this firm, strong, rough man, when you see or hear him, that he brings with him the Lord Himself, concerning whom the prophets wrote, and whom you have awaited. And in these words of the prophet Malachi it is indicated how God will work and operate upon the hearts of men through the preaching and word of John, and not in any other way. For where Christ is to be received and people are to be saved through Him, He must first be pointed out and recognized by this preaching. Therefore He says: "Behold, this is the

messenger whom I send before Thee,” that is, wherever I am to give my Spirit and eternal life, there this messenger, that is, this minister, sent of God, must prepare the way.

This was a necessary sermon for the Jews, of the greatest moment to them, and their salvation or eternal condemnation depended on this, that they should find Him. For if they would be saved, they must be prudent and wise, and not miss nor neglect the time, which nevertheless the greater part of them have done for more than fifteen hundred years; for they were in th* greatest danger that, if they would not receive Him, they would be deprived of their salvation, and all their hoping and waiting would have been in vain. It depended even on this short period, as if it were but a moment, during which the old Mosaic government should cease, and the new kingdom of Christ be established in all the world. Therefore God before warned them in the Scripture, showed and indicated the time and manner, how and when He should come, and besides sent this John to show and tell them clearly that Christ had already come, in order that they might by no means miss Him, nor have any reason or excuse to offer. Therefore, He says, look well to this that John has taught you rightly and faithfully, and not as a prophet, but as he who goes immediately before the Lord and points Him out. For you have before heard prophets enough, and know well that your Messiah is to come, but now more depends on this, that you go to this John and receive and believe his preaching; so shall you no more hear the prophetic preaching, as of one yet to come, but him who prepares the way before the Lord. Let him tell you who Christ is, then you will not err, nor miss Him. Now you hear that he has preached and said thus: You need not wait for Him to appear with new and great pomp and splendor; but He stands already in your midst like other men, without any special pomp or show. This alone is his fore-running and sign, that I with my voice and finger direct to Him, just as at court, before they see the prince, a youth or *valet-de-chamber* and door-keeper go immediately before him. When they see these, all must go out of the way and give place, and know that the next one who follows is the prince himself. Thus also here, when they heard the testimony of John they should have obeyed and said: Now we have the dear man; blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord, and be welcome now, dear Lord and King; here stands the temple, here are the priesthood, the service, kingdom, all; they are all Thine; do with them as Thou wilt, we will willingly serve and follow Thee with soul, body and goods.

Thus the Jews were faithfully warned of God, so that they could well have recognized their Messiah if they had wished it, and in Him have had their Lord and Savior, so that to this day they would both temporally and eternally have comfort, joy, honor and all good. But they are the great, excellent, holy people, who despise this message and say of John that he has a devil; see Christ preaching and working miracles, before their eyes, and in the midst of it all put Him to death. Still, that this preaching might not be in vain, there were a few pious hearts among them, who with gratitude received the testimony of this forerunner and the Lord Himself, and were filled with joyful surprise at the remarkable fulfillment of the writings of the prophets. These were the dear children of God, who were not offended in Christ and are blessed. The other Jews, the mass of them, who despised such witness, because they did not see in Christ what they wanted and as they wanted it, also have their reward, in that they are scattered to this day, and now have neither Christ nor priesthood, temple, land nor people.

Admonition.

Therefore we also should let this sermon of Christ be an admonition and warning to us. For we also, through the preaching of the gospel, hear this voice of John the Baptist, which directs unto this Savior, Christ, and says: This is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world. To Him you should cling in faith and confession, and thank God that He has given you this knowledge, and this sermon and direction of John the Baptist shall endure to eternity. But now it depends upon this too, whether we are people who receive the testimony. For if, like the greater part of the Jews, and as, alas! is always the case in the world, we let it pass by, we will share the same fate with them and others. Factions and sects will come afterwards, through which the pure doctrine and God's Word will be darkened among us, and go out altogether. Then will they begin to seek Christ, and will be unable to find Him, just as was formerly done in the darkness of the papacy. For no one can give any other doctrine unto salvation than this, as Peter says, Acts 4: There is no other name nor doctrine, whereby we can be saved. If we neglect this, it is all over with us, as it is now with the Jews and Turks. There will be no lack of teachers; we will have enough of these, as the Jews and Turks also have, who will preach much and want to show the way to heaven, and every one will show diligence in seeking, as the Jews

now also seek their Messiah; but, alas! it is a seeking always in vain, and never any finding. For He made all depend only on this His messenger who pointed Him out with his voice and finger, that we might know where to find Him; else it would end in nothing, and our seeking would ever be in vain.

Therefore we must now say, as the prophet Isaiah writes in the 55th chapter: “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near.” That is, hear this sermon concerning Christ and believe in Him, as it teaches you, and hold fast to it, then you have rightly found Him, so that He will remain with you and you with Him. This is now also preached to the world, and especially to us; but we do even as the Jews did to John and to Christ Himself, who so diligently warned them. Men are unwilling to hear the voice of this preacher, or to receive this Savior. The majority, – farmers, citizens, noblemen, lords, – persecute this doctrine; our own people, who are called Evangelical, do not regard it, and are tardy in furthering it. They think that other matters are of more importance, therefore neglect it, and pulpits, churches and schools go to ruin; and though with one finger they could save them, they will not do it, lest they should in the meantime neglect their own matters.

Well, even if John has been here with his sermon, and war and misfortune come, men will not be able to hear this sermon. For where war and desolation are, there God’s Word, pulpits and schools find no room nor encouragement; instruction and discipline cease; contempt of God, and all manner of lawlessness and unrighteousness gain the ascendancy. And although the gospel is not destroyed by war and murder, yet in the contempt and ingratitude of the world, it will perish through lying and false doctrine. Now we would have peace and prosperity, if we would be wise and hold fast to this man. If we make a mistake and neglect it, the punishment will also come, and the devil will govern bodily, instead of Christ, through murder, and in the soul through lies. The Jews also thought there was no danger; they had God’s promise, and it could not fail, and their Messiah would certainly come; now God fulfills His promise, sends them the promised Christ, and lets John point to Him with his finger and say: Here you have Him; receive Him, and you have God, the kingdom of heaven and all. But what does it avail in their case? They let John preach, and had to acknowledge that he was a good man, but did not regard his preaching and

testimony, and did not receive Christ. But they also paid for it dearly, and must pay for it today yet. God grant that we may not lose this finger on account of our great ingratitude, else we may also accept what we have deserved.

In short, this is the necessary, daily admonition, which may be given in the churches, to give heed to John's finger, and receive God's Word while we have it: that is, as Isaiah says, "to seek the Lord while He may be found: for I, says He, hear thee in an acceptable time, and help thee in the day of salvation." But the apostle Paul says: *Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation*, or of help; now we can find Him; hereafter we will have waited too long. If He is not here, or does not come to us, no one can find Him; if He is away, no calling nor crying after Him will avail anything, as I and many others in monasticism have tried, who have tortured ourselves with much labor and grievous works, and yet could not thereby find the way to heaven, and would have had to go to hell if we had died thus. Therefore let us heed this warning, for it is no jest. It is a great treasure; but it depends upon this, that we receive it and hold it fast, as He says, Luke 11: *Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it. Amen.*

Fourth Sunday In Advent. John 1:19-28.

And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that Prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water; but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. – John 1:19-28.

This is also one of the beautiful, glorious gospels about the highest article of our faith, where we do not hear anything about the Ten Commandments, or what we are to do, but about something higher; namely, what Christ is, and what He has done. For John praises Him so highly that, though he himself led a very holy life, yet he freely confesses: I am not worthy that I should unloose the latchet of His shoes. Therefore this gospel is of nearly the same import with the former, only that here there are other words and persons.

For, a week ago, we heard that every thing depends on this, that we do not miss this person, Christ Jesus, but receive Him and not let Him pass by

nor look after others. For whoever finds Him, finds redemption from sin, death and hell. For thus God hath resolved, that in Christ all fullness should dwell, and that He should be all, "He is the way, the truth and the life." Through Him alone all patriarchs, prophets, apostles and saints, from the beginning of the world, have been saved. This John knows and therefore directs his disciples to Him, that they may not neglect such a treasure. For this is always the miserable affliction and trouble of the world, that men adopt many kinds of plans and ways, aside from God's Word, for getting to heaven, as we have seen hitherto in the papacy, where one ran to a cloister and became a monk, another fasted, a third sought the intercession of this or that saint; and thus every one would have his own plan, and find his own way to heaven.

To guard against such injurious projects, God, in the first place, gave His Word to His people and therein promised that He would help them through the seed of the woman, that is, through His Son Jesus Christ; to Him He has directed us, that in Him alone should be the way to heaven. Whoever misses Him has missed salvation, although he have fasted himself to death, and prayed himself into lunacy. Again, whoever hath received Him by faith, and put His trust in Him, hath found forgiveness of sin and eternal salvation, and neither devil nor sin could hinder it. All the patriarchs and prophets followed this way, and thus were saved by faith in Christ. For if ever any one could have gone to heaven by his own holy life, it would certainly have been the holy Fathers and Prophets, who for God's sake labored and suffered beyond measure in this wicked, ungodly world. But they all despaired of their own holiness, and clung with firm confidence to the promised blessed seed, who should crush the head of the serpent.

But the greater part of the Jews, at the time of Christ, would not follow this way, but thought, what should this carpenter be? We must observe the law, fast, offer services, look sad, give alms; this, no doubt, is the nearest and best way to heaven; this beggar, Jesus of Nazareth, cannot help us. For Christ was altogether poor and wretched, so that whoever did not cling to His miracles and teachings, could find nothing else in Him that made any impression. Now, in order that the Jews might not suffer Him to pass by, nor miss Him, our merciful Father so ordered it that John should go before our Lord Jesus and sound the trumpet, like a herald before the prince, so that when they heard it, they might open their eyes and look upon Him who

immediately followed, who would be the right man. Therefore when the Jews here send this embassy and ask him whether he were Christ, or Elias, or that Prophet, he answers plainly, No, I am not He. And when they ask further, What art thou then, why baptisest thou, what sayest thou of thyself? he answers: I will tell you, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord;" that is, I am the trumpet before the prince; therefore hear my preaching, for He will soon come after me, and will baptize you with the Holy Ghost, whilst I as a servant baptize only with water. Yea, He standeth already among you; but you know Him not. Therefore this is my office for which I am sent, that I should be a crying voice, or preacher in the wilderness, in order that, when you hear the sound of my trumpet, you might know that He is here. He who comes next after me is the one. For of this the prophet Isaiah has also prophesied in the 40th chapter: "The voice of one that cries in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord," etc. I preach not of myself, nor of the law of Moses and the service of your temple and priesthood, but speak openly, and to every one who will hear it, of this Savior who is to come. Therefore you must not wait for Him any longer, as though He were yet far off; but look upon Him now; He is already in your midst, though you know Him not; but I am to show Him to you, that you may know and receive Him, This office I now have, and say unto you: The next preacher who will come after me, is the Lord Himself. He does not yet preach openly, but will be heard soon after me; look well to it therefore, that you give heed to Him and do not miss Him.

Now as John preached, so it came to pass. For immediately after His baptism Christ began to work miracles in Galilee, and, soon after John, sent forth the preaching of His gospel by the twelve Apostles and other two and seventy disciples whom He sent out, commanding them to preach: The kingdom of heaven is at hand; that is, Christ is at hand, and He is the one of whom John testified and said, "He will come after me, but He was before me." Now John was a half year older than Christ the Lord; yet he says, "He was before me." This sounds very strangely, and would to the Jews have been a blasphemous word, if they had understood it. For who could reconcile this, that John says "He would come after him," that is, that He had not preached before him, and hitherto no one had acknowledged Him as a preacher or man sent of God, "and yet He had been before him;" not only personally, or as to His being, but also as to His office and power, as He Himself says, John 8th chapter: "Before Abraham was, I am;" on account of

which the Jews wished to stone Him. – But at this time the Jews did not understand nor regard this. But with these words John certainly intended to convey this meaning, and to indicate the divine glory of this Person, as he also sufficiently intimates when he says: “I am not worthy to unloose His shoe’s, latchet.”

Therefore this declaration, “He was before me, although He shall come after me,” is as much as to say: He is much greater, higher and mightier than I, or any man; for He is the one who was before I or others before me preached, that is, He is an eternal, divine Person, and before He was born on earth, from the beginning of the world, He was always with His Church, and worked all things therein. For if He was before John the Baptist, and yet did not live bodily among the people, He must also have been before all the other Fathers and Prophets, who believed in and preached Him, since the first promise was given concerning Him, immediately after the fall of Adam, that He should bruise the serpent’s head, that is, redeem our first parents and the whole Church from the power of the devil, and give them everlasting salvation. Here the Jews should have given their assent and thought: What a Man and Person must this be, before whom John so deeply humbles himself, and says that he is not worthy to perform the meanest service for Him! Dear John, are you not worthy? Nay, he says, I am not worthy of it; for whoever I might be, I would be nothing compared with this Man. Thus he casts all his holiness from him under this Man’s feet, and says that he would gladly be content if he could only be permitted to clean His shoes.

Now in order that the Jews might not think that he was humbling himself too much, since he had inaugurated baptism, and was more than an ordinary preacher, he instructs them well concerning his baptism, and says: *I baptize with water*, that is, I have with me a sign of my preaching, like the other prophets. – Jeremiah wore a wooden yoke; Isaiah went naked and barefoot, when he prophesied to the Egyptians and Ethiopians how they should be plundered and stripped by the enemies, Is. 20. Thus, says John, I also have a new sermon and a new sign; I preach that you should prepare the way of the Lord. I would not need to preach this if the way had been prepared before. Then I wash and baptize you, as a sign that you are unclean and defiled, and must be cleansed; but I do not baptize you in my own name, or thinking that I could cleanse you, but in His name, concerning whom I preach; namely,

that you may know and believe that He is the One who baptizes you through the Holy Ghost; and yet even through this my office and baptism, which I begin, He will work, and for His sake my water baptism will be valid and effectual. For concerning John's baptism we must know also this, that it was not only a sign or symbol or indication, as Isaiah's going naked and barefoot, and as Jeremiah's wearing the yoke, were admonitions that the people should repent; but it was also a sign, through which they should be awakened to believe in Christ and know that for His sake, if they turn unto God and believe in this Savior, they should have forgiveness of sins. And thus John herewith commenced the office of the New Testament, that is, the same preaching concerning the Savior Christ, and the same baptism, which were afterward spread abroad further by the Savior Himself and the Apostles.

Thus the preaching of John is directed to this, that they should not let the man pass by, but think of Him. Behold, he has told us of one who should arise after him; this must certainly be this Jesus who now attracts so much attention by His preaching and miracles. But what happened? They heard John indeed, but did not believe his testimony, nay, put both of them to death, Christ and His forerunner, cut John's head off and crucified Christ, of whom John had faithfully preached, and warned every one to receive Him. Such pious hypocrites there have always been, who not only despised the preaching of the prophets, and persecuted and put them to death on account of it, but also afterwards crucified the Lord Himself, whom the prophets foretold.

And this is still the case: for Christ must be crucified, not only in His own person, but also in His members. With John we would fain direct every one to the right way of salvation and say: Out of Christ there is no forgiveness of sin, nor eternal life. But what takes place? The more, faithfully we warn people against their own good works as a false ground, and direct them to the true rock, Christ, the more our opponents call us heretics and condemn us. For this does not agree with their teachers, as every one knows. They direct them to their cloisters, to the sacrifice of the mass and to their masses for the souls of the departed, appoint vigils, ordain worship, go on pilgrimages, buy indulgences, etc. But this is not directing to Christ, but seeking other ways to heaven aside from Christ. Against this we speak, and admonish the people to hold fast the testimony of John, who

directs unto Christ. The pope and his hangers-on cannot endure this, but condemn us on this account as heretics, and if they could they would reward and thank us just as the Jews did holy John. But why are they so inimical? why can they not tolerate us? For no other reason than because we, with John, preach that they should humble themselves before Christ, and that with all their good works they are not worthy to wipe His shoes. For they themselves must confess that John was much holier than they; yet he says: I will not and cannot speak in praise of my own holiness; if only this grace could be shown me that I might take off or wipe the shoes of this Man, it would be sufficient for me. Such humility we would like to call forth through the gospel, and therefore admonish every one, according to our office, to avoid sins and be pious: yet not to comfort themselves before God with such piety, but like John to regard their own good works and honorable life as filthy rags, when compared with the high, pure, perfect and great righteousness which our Lord Jesus Christ has wrought out for us by His sufferings and death. But pope and bishops, monks and priests will not follow the word; they cannot and will not let go their confidence in their own and the deceased saints' merits.

Therefore they have no desire to be made partakers of the benefit and merit of our Lord Jesus Christ; comforting themselves with it, like God-fearing hearts, who feel their sins and dread the wrath and judgment of God, is entirely out of the question. Like insane people, who have never thought of, much less felt, what sin and death are, they keep crying out yet, that man is justified not only through faith, but that works also add their part, and are not willing therefore, like John, who disregards all holiness and thinks himself, compared with Christ, not better than an old rag with which to clean soiled shoes, to let Christ be their treasure; but set so much value upon their own human holiness and works that they think them worthy of eternal life. Therefore they can in no way tolerate comparing their worship and holiness with old rags; nay, they imagine that Christ delights in them, and that He must give them eternal life for them.

Therefore no one should take offence at this, that Papists of our time despise and persecute the gospel. The same thing happened to John, Christ, and the Apostles themselves; their doctrine was not only despised, but they all were, on account of it, persecuted and miserably put to death. Well, the Jews received their reward; so they who despise and slander us will not

escape their punishment. But let us thank God, that we have the pure word again; and above all things, let us take heed to the preaching of John, when he says: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord;" and again "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." Here he says nothing about our works, merits, etc., but points us directly to Christ, in whom we find and have it all.

Then, too, we ought diligently to contemplate the example of John's humility, that he, who, as Christ testifies, has not his equal among them who are born of women, so that of course all the monks and priests who ever lived under the papacy with all their holiness are unfit to bear him a drink of water, humbles himself so deeply as to say that, with all his holiness and good works, he is not worthy to stoop down and unloose the Savior's shoe-latchet. Let this be an example of humility in John which we not only notice, but also imitate. We should do good works, and that with the greatest diligence; for thus God has told and commanded us in the Ten Commandments, and it is surely not in vain that He has given us these from heaven. It is His word, hence He wishes us to keep it. Therefore let every one use diligence to live according to it, and thus to show forth his obedience and thankfulness towards God, that He has given us His dear Son, who for our sakes humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, on which He rendered satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. On this Man's obedience and work place your dependence, and build firmly upon it, and cast all the good you have ever done at His feet, and confess freely and heartily with John, that it is not worthy that you should wipe the Savior's shoes with it.

Before men it is indeed fine, clean, beautiful cloth, a costly treasure and virtue, that you are no adulterer, no thief nor murderer, that you give alms and are diligent in your office or calling; this we may and should praise in the world, and regard it as satin, silk and gold. But when you come before God and His judgment, say: Before Thee, Lord, my best satin and gold are worse than tatters. Therefore judge me not according to my works; I will willingly let them be Thy old rags, and Thy Son's foot-clouts, and will gladly be content if I may only be deemed worthy of even this.

Thus St. Paul also does, when he says, Phil. 3 "I am an Israelite, as touching the law a Pharisee; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." This we may indeed regard as something unusual when a man

can thus praise himself. “Yet, says he, for Christ’s sake I regard all this holiness as loss and dung,” and it is my highest joy and best consolation that I shall be found, not in my own righteousness, which is after the law, but in that which comes through faith in Christ, which God imputes to faith. Here Paul speaks still more plainly than John; the latter gives the matter a little finer turn, and calls his good works shoe-clouts; but Paul calls them dirt and dung. This is speaking filthily enough about our holy life. But St. Paul speaks of such a life as that of the Pharisees and hypocrites, in which men, without and aside from faith in Christ, place their confidence in their own works, and presume therewith to merit forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Now it is true that it is God’s will that we should live in all virtue, and, as St. Paul says, touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless; as he also often writes in other places, and especially in the same Epistle to the Philippians, where he says, chap. 2: “So live that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke,” etc. Likewise: “If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” And since such righteousness is according to the law of works, surely it cannot be condemned. Nay, it is also certain that such a life and good works, in those who believe in Christ, are well-pleasing to God for the sake of the same Mediator, Jesus Christ, and that, according to the promise, they will be rewarded of God temporally and eternally.

But besides this, we should always and especially know, that we must not build the honor of our worthiness or merit, nor the comfort of our salvation, upon our life. For however good or holy our life may be, it is not without sin or impurity before God; therefore it cannot stand before the judgment of God, as the holy prophets often confess this in the Scriptures; but only the righteousness and holiness of the Son of God will avail there, who, through His obedience and the sacrifice of His sufferings and death, has propitiated and taken away God’s wrath which we have deserved, and purchased for us and given to us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, so that for His sake, if we believe in Him, we are acceptable to God and heirs of eternal life. To this we can never attain through our own works and holiness. Therefore, although our life and the good works in us, who believe in Christ, are acceptable to God, and we thereby serve the Lord Jesus, and have the reputation of a good conscience before the whole world, yet we

have on their account no honor before God and His judgment; as St. Paul also says Rom. 4, about the holy father Abraham: “Abraham hath whereof to glory, but not before God.” Therefore, when we speak of righteousness before God and forgiveness of sins, redemption from eternal death and merit of eternal life, we must humble Ourselves with John the Baptist and Paul, and say: I cling to my Lord Jesus and His holiness, which He promises and gives to me in Baptism, in the Word and Sacrament, and am content to be a poor worm; in order that we may make a distinction between our life and holiness and the righteousness of Christ. For our holiness and life will not stand against God’s wrath and eternal death, but every thing, if it be found without Christ, will be swallowed up by death.

The heathen have also maintained good discipline and propriety of conduct, and have done and suffered much for their country, wherefore also they ought to be praised; but thereby they have not attained to forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God, and with all their honor death has snatched them away. But in order that we may lay hold of that righteousness and holiness which avails before God and unto eternal life, it is necessary that we humble ourselves with John and say: Lord, here comes a poor little rag, an old, torn, filthy shoe-clout, or as Paul says, stinking dirt, if it should come before Thee without Christ. Before the world, and aside from Thy judgment, it may indeed be musk, satin and gold, but before Thee, Lord, let me be an old rag or foot-cloth, with which I may wipe the shoes of Thy Son, and grant me His righteousness; for He with His righteousness is my dearest and most precious treasure. For I know that through Him and His righteousness I shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; whilst through my own righteousness I must go down into the abyss of hell.

Hence we must freely and fully conclude that our monk’s and priest’s life, cloisters and all things of this kind that may be mentioned, all belong to the devil in hell. For with their good works they do not look to this, that they may render due obedience to God, and give offense to no one, but that therewith they might be saved. Therefore they also sell their good works to other people. But this is denying Christ, nay mocking Him, as the Jews also mocked Him. Of such an abomination we should beware, and learn here how to meet such deceivers, that we may say to them: Thou poor man, dost thou undertake to save me with thy filthy works and holiness? – John, Paul,

Peter and other saints could not do this; else they would not have thought and spoken so disparagingly of their own holiness. If we would still use the cloisters as training-houses, to educate youths and let them study the Scriptures, it would be a very beneficial, practical use. But the pope and his ungodly hangers-on will not permit this, but direct every one, through such cloister-life, to heaven. But they will surely find, in this way, a heaven where flame and fire strike out of the windows. Therefore it would be much better to have such cloisters razed to the ground, than that people should thus be turned away from Christ, and injured in body and soul.

Learn then from this gospel, as in a summary, that we should live justly and honorably among men, be diligent in good works, and give offense to no one, God demands such obedience by His law, and will have us render it; and if we do not render it, He will visit us with the scourge, with the hangman, with the sword, and at last with the fire of hell. This, I say, we are bound to do by the divine law. But when thou comest before God say: Lord, as far as my works and holiness are concerned, I am lost. Therefore I desire to be an old rag at the feet of my Lord Jesus. For by my life I have deserved nothing but that He should cast me into hell. But I desire His holiness, that He would sanctify me with another, better and eternal holiness; thus I can surely comfort myself with and await eternal life.

Neither pope nor bishops are willing to hear this; for they see well what must follow; namely, that bishoprics and cloisters, the mass and all their false worship, would not last long; therefore they hold fast to them so tenaciously, the most of them for the sake of their belly, the smaller number because they hope to be saved thereby. John did not do this, neither did Paul; they do not wish to retain their own righteousness and holiness. So also all Christians should do, saying with Paul: My holiness is stinking filth and rubbish before God, if I would thereby seek to merit grace and eternal life, – and with John: My holiness is an old rag, if I compare it with the holiness and works of Christ. But the Papists will be neither dirt nor rags with their masses, vows, fasting and praying, but put us to death, because we do not agree with them, and strive to direct the people into another and better way. Well, they are a generation of vipers, out of which nothing good can ever grow; they will find what they are seeking. But let us take good heed to the mouth and finger of John, with which He points and directs us,

in order that we may not overlook nor miss our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom he so diligently and faithfully leads and guides us.

This is the chief doctrine of this gospel lesson, that John so diligently points from himself to the Lord Christ, and thus so deeply humbles himself, and so highly exalts and praises Christ. The other part, that the Pharisees and High Priests send to John and presume to put down and forbid his baptizing and preaching, because he himself says that he is neither Christ, nor Elias, nor a prophet; likewise, that he makes a difference between his baptism, wherewith he baptizes as a servant, and the baptism of Christ, who Himself is Lord, and who alone can give the Spirit, – these would be too long to treat of here, except that we should learn this from them yet, how the world, and especially what is wise and high in the world, is the enemy of God's works, and would like to smother and suppress them, as the High Priests and Pharisees do here. But John has the right spirit and power of Elias, that is, an unterrified heart, does not suffer his preaching nor baptizing to be forbidden, until Herod takes him by the head, casts him into the tower, and finally kills him. This he suffers, for God's sake, willingly and patiently, in the sure hope that, through His Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ, he will have a gracious God and eternal life. May God, our dear heavenly Father, grant us this through His Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

First Sermon For Christmas. Concerning The History Of Christ's Birth In Bethlehem. Luke 2:1-14

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem[^] (because he was of the house and lineage of David,) to be taxed with Mary, his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, .lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. – Luke 2:1-14

This festival of the birth of our dear Lord Jesus Christ is instituted among Christians especially that we may preach this history and learn it well, that it may be kept in remembrance by the young and the common people, that it may be impressed upon their hearts, and that they may rightly learn to know their Savior. For although we tell it yearly, yet we cannot sufficiently preach nor learn it. Therefore we will divide the gospel lesson into two parts: first, we will in the most simple manner relate the history as it took place; then, secondly, hear how the dear angels preach and sing about it.

The first point in the history is this: That Christ was born just at that time when the Jews and their property were for the first time taxed under the Emperor Augustus. At that time already our dear Lord Jesus began to reign in the world, although secretly, and the great Emperor Augustus, with his empire, must serve Him, although unwittingly, and by His command furnish the occasion for the Virgin Mary with her espoused husband to go to Bethlehem, and there, as the prophets had written, give birth to the Savior of the world. – Otherwise, if this had not been brought about by the emperor's command, Joseph and Mary would doubtless have remained at home. But since Christ is to be born at Bethlehem, the emperor must furnish the occasion thereto, and thus serve the Lord Jesus at His birth; although neither the emperor nor the world knew anything about it. For the world is so wicked and unfaithful, that she would otherwise rather have hindered than furthered it. But God so conducts His government that often she must do unwittingly what no one could induce her to do knowingly.

Now it was very inconvenient and hard for this virgin, so near the time of her delivery, that just at this time, in the midst of winter, she had to undertake this long journey to a strange place, where she was not acquainted and knew no certain place to which she could go; and that these two people were very poor we know from this, that Joseph could not spare her, or leave her at home with his or her friends, or otherwise provide for her, until she should bring forth the child; but because he does not know where to leave her, nor any one to whom to commend her, she must go with him on this long journey (for from Galilee to Bethlehem in the land of Judea is as far, if not further, than with us from Saxony to France) and both take their little possessions with them. Perhaps Joseph also took an ass along for her. For they had to make arrangements now to settle down and live at Bethlehem, where they belonged on account of their lineage; which

would also have been more convenient for them if they could have found a place. For hitherto, on account of their poverty, and because King Herod had persecuted the whole royal race of David and murdered many of them, this poor virgin and her parents had to live as outcasts back in the borders of the Jewish land at Nazareth.

When they now get to Bethlehem and the time has arrived that she should bring forth, everything is unprepared. For she finds no one among them all who wants to know her, and among so many women no hostess who would give her a chamber or other place in the house for herself, and was willing to be with her at this time, when one woman is generally willing to help another all she can; but must, together with her Joseph, stay in an open stable, where the common cattle of poor people are put; here she finds no preparation, and has no help nor service from any one at this birth. And after the birth there is again no one who, for the young child's sake, would take her in and afford her a better place, even in a corner, or would offer her even the smallest service, except that Joseph perhaps spoke to a poor pious maid-servant, who may have occasionally made a fire for her, or brought her a little water, but had mostly to wait on her himself.

And for her, as mother, this is the hardest, that this young child, of whom, by faith, she knows that He is the Son of God, and by descent the true Lord and King of the Jewish people, does not among His own people and in His own fatherland, and in His father David's own city, meet with even so much favor, that He might have a borrowed cradle or a little bed, aside from His mother's bosom and the manger, where He is wrapped in such poor swaddling clothes as she could procure; and to this place the angels direct the shepherds, where no one would look for the child of the poorest, most wretched woman of the country. Here in the cold she had to warm the child, perhaps at a little fire of coals, bathe it, and when it would sleep and she could not hold it in her arms or fold it to her bosom, she had to lay it on a bundle of hay, and cover it with her veil, or cloak or whatever she may have had.

This is in brief the history, which no doubt the Evangelist wished thus to present to us, who are generally so cold, that our hearts might, if possible, be warmed a little by contemplating the humble birth of Christ into the world. Bethlehem would indeed have been worthy to be sunken then to the depth of hell, since she did not even honor her Savior so much as to lend

Him the most humble cradle and pillow. His cradle is in the first place the bosom of His dear mother, afterward the manger. – Thus this child is rocked to sleep. This poor woman in child-bed, if she would not take cold, may cover herself with her cloak or whatever else she may have with her; for here there is no one who would lend child or mother anything, serve them, or help them in the least.

For shame, thou base Bethlehem, who dost show thyself so hard and unmerciful toward thy Savior, that thou dost not serve Him even in the smallest matter! Thou hadst deserved, even more than Sodom, that fire and brimstone should have come down from heaven and utterly destroyed thee. For although the Virgin Mary had been a beggar, or, if we may venture even to say it, a dishonest woman who did not regard her honor, yet in such a time of need any one should have been willing to serve her, and should not have let the little child lie among the cattle. Nay, but nothing of the kind takes place; this little child must be wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, in order that it may have somewhere to stay, and have its honors on earth. Thus this Lord was received on earth, where others gormandize, make a great show with beautiful clothes, grand houses, etc.

So much concerning the first part of the history, which is written for us that we might learn to take to heart this picture, how our dear Lord Jesus was born on earth in such poverty, and that we might never forget it, especially since we learn from the sermon of the angel that it was for our good. For here we see the great and wonderful work of God, that for the sake of poor, wretched humanity He lets His only begotten Son take upon Him human nature and become true man, and as such endure all weakness and misery, nay take upon Him even our sins, though without sin in Himself, and become a sacrifice for them, in order that we might learn to thank and praise God for this great benefit, that we poor, wretched, nay even condemned men, today attain to such great honor of becoming one flesh and blood with the Son of God. For the very eternal Son of the eternal Father, through whom heaven and earth were created out of nothing, He, as we hear, became man, was born into the world like us, except that in Him there never was any sin. Therefore we may now boast that God has become our brother, nay our flesh and blood. This great honor was conferred, not upon the angels, but upon us men. And although the angels are more glorious creatures than we are, yet God has honored us more highly, and

come nearer to us than to the angels, since He became not an angel, but man. Now if we men would properly think of this, and heartily believe it, this inexpressible grace and benefit of our heavenly Father would cause us great joy, and impel us to thank God from our hearts, to love Him, and willingly to submit to His will.

In the papacy they used to tell a story: The devil once came to church to mass, and when in the confession of the Christian faith, which they called the *Patrem*, they sang the words: “*Et homo, factum est*”– the Son of God was made man – and the people did not kneel down but stood, he struck one on the mouth, rebuked him and said: You ruffian, are you not ashamed that you stand here like a stock, and do not fall down for joy? If the Son of God had become our brother, like yours, we would not know what to do for joy.

I do not think that this is true; for the devil is too decided in his enmity to us and the Lord Jesus; but this is true, that he who conceived this story had the right spirit, and well understood how great an honor was conferred upon us in that the Son of God became man; not like Eve nor Adam, who was made of the earth; but He is still more nearly related to us, since He was born of the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, like other men, except that the virgin was alone, and being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, conceived this blessed fruit without sin and by the Holy Spirit. In other respects He is like unto us, and a natural Son of a woman.

Adam and Eve were not born, but created. God made Adam out of the dust of the earth, and the woman of his rib. How much nearer is Christ to us than Eve to her husband Adam, since He is truly our flesh and blood. Such honor we should highly esteem and well take to heart, that the Son of God became flesh, and that there is no difference at all between His and our flesh, only that His flesh is without sin. For He was so conceived of the Holy Ghost, and God poured out so richly His Holy Spirit into the soul and body of the Virgin Mary that without any sin she conceived and bore our Lord Jesus. Aside from this, in all other respects, He was like other men; He ate, drank, was hungry, thirsty, cold like other men. Such and similar natural infirmities, which have descended upon us by reason of sin, He, who was without sin, bore and had like unto us, as St. Paul says; “He was made in the likeness of men, and found in fashion as a man.”

Thus the high, eternal, glorious Majesty deeply humbled Himself, coming down to us. For He might well have become a man such a He is now in heaven, where He has flesh and blood like unto us, but does not live this poor, weak, infirm life which we live on earth. This He might have done from the beginning: and still it would have been great humility, and a great honor to the human race: but He did not wish to do it, in order that He might show how great and sincere a love He has for us, so great that He took upon Him our infirm nature, in order that He might take away our sin, by which our nature is depraved, and death, which reigns over us through sin, and thus make us like unto His own glorious body, which He now has, so that we can rejoice in this, comfort ourselves and boast that we have a Brother in heaven, who is the Son of God Himself, whom we may, nay should approach as our own flesh and blood. For he is a wretched man who does not come unto this Savior, nor permit this joy to come into his heart.

This now is the reason why this history is preached every year, that every young heart may form this image within itself, praise God for it, and say: Now, thank God! I am in no danger; for I have a Brother, the Son of God, who became such as I am. Why He became such, and what He wished to accomplish thereby, we will hear further on. For it can have been for no other reason than that He would deliver us from sin and eternal death, in which we formerly lay captive. But I am now speaking only of the great and high honor to the whole human race, of which we may truly boast, and should rejoice, that the Son of God became man. Of such honor all men can boast. But herein Christians have the preference, that they shall enjoy this honor to eternity. This we should mark in the first place in this history.

Again, this very noble example serves this purpose: Since Christ, the Son of God, so deeply humbled Himself and bestowed all His honor on our poor flesh, and the Divine Majesty, before whom angels tremble, condescended so far, and went about as a poor beggar; up in heaven the angels worship Him, here on earth He serves us and lies down in our miry clay: since the Son of God has done this, as an offering of praise, honor and thankfulness to Him, we will also be truly humble, and according to His word bear the cross which He lays upon us, suffer all manner of tribulation, and follow Him. For what can it harm us, or why should we be ashamed of sufferings? Our Lord Himself suffered cold, hunger and sorrow, and all kinds of wretchedness and want. Especially, as already said, was His advent

and birth into this world characterized by the greatest poverty and want. There was neither a room nor apartment of any kind, neither pillow nor bed-clothes; He had to lie in a manger before the cows and oxen. Now if your dear Friend, nay your Brother, the King of heaven and earth and all creatures, lies there in such wretchedness and poverty, shame on you, that you would have every thing so fine and glorious, and suffer nothing! Think who you are! Is it true that you are a poor sinner, and worthy of nothing better than that you should lie upon thorns? Yet, whilst your Lord lies on hard straw, in a manger, you lie on a soft bed; and still you are discontented and complain of great sufferings!

But is not this a deplorable thing? We see how humble and poor Jesus is for our sakes; and we would be fine fellows, escape free and suffer nothing; nay, in our pride and impatience we are even angry and complain if we are to suffer a little. But this does not agree well together, that our Lord and Savior is born in such poverty and want for our sake, also dies for us on the cross, and we lazy fellows would always enjoy the greatest ease and peace. No, this will not do: “The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord,” says the Savior.

Therefore we should well learn, and earnestly consider, first, what honor was conferred upon us, in that Christ, the Son of God, became man. For it is such an honor, that if one were an angel, he might wish he were a man, in order that he might boast: My flesh and blood are exalted above all angels. Wherefore we men ought truly to count ourselves blessed. God grant that we may understand it, take it to heart, and thank Him for it. In the second place, we should diligently look upon the example of Christ, what He, who is Lord of all lords, in His first advent to us poor men, did and suffered for our sake. This would induce and impel us, from our hearts also willingly to help and serve other people, even though it required great self-denial, and we should, on their account, have to suffer. To this may God help us by His Holy Spirit, through our dear Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

Second Sermon For Christmas. What the Angels Announce and Proclaim to the Shepherds about This History. Luke 2:1-14

We have now heard the history of this day, how Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born into this world, and what we are to learn from it. The Evangelist tells us that when this happened at Bethlehem an angel from heaven appeared to several shepherds, who were with their flocks in a field nearby, accompanied by a great and glorious light, and spake to the shepherds about this birth in the following words: “Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”

This is the first sermon about this new-born child, our Lord Jesus, brought by the angels from heaven to us on earth. Therefore it is well worthy that we should diligently study it, and be careful not to think that we know all about it already. For though we should preach it every year and every day we will never, here on earth, learn all about it.

But this sermon of the angels was very necessary; for though Christ should have been born twenty times, it would have been in vain if we had known nothing about it. For what does it profit a man if he has a treasure in his house or cellar and knows nothing of it? It can give him neither pleasure nor joy. As the proverb says: *Ignoli nulla cupido*, a hidden treasure is a useless treasure, which we may walk over, as over the filth in the street, regardless of it. If God had not through the dear angels, and otherwise, preached to the people and revealed this treasure, no one could have

desired, much less enjoyed it, no one would have rejoiced in it. The reason is that what one does not know does not affect him; it gives him neither joy nor sorrow, but is as though it had never been, or should never come to pass.

Therefore this is one of the chief parts of the gospel lesson for today, that the angel by his sermon reveals this birth, and shows us this treasure, in order that we may not pass by where this treasure is lying without knowing anything about it, and thus, of course, derive neither consolation nor joy from it. Therefore the angel begins his sermon about this matter, that we might be aroused to look upon this our great treasure, and says: "I bring you good tidings of great joy."

These words are well placed. The shepherds are frightened by this unusual apparition of the great light and glory, heaven and earth being in a moment full of light and fire, in the darkness of the night. The angel sees this, and therefore addresses them joyfully and says: "Fear not." As though he should say: You have no reason to be afraid; your fear is a sure sign that you know nothing yet of that noble, precious treasure which God has given you; else you would not fear, nay, you would rather rejoice and be glad in your hearts. For I come for the purpose of bringing you good tidings, a great work and miracle, which, when you properly understand it, will cause you to rejoice and be glad beyond measure.

Thus the angel is chiefly concerned so to preach that it would take hold of the hearts and not be in vain, but would accomplish its purpose. Therefore he does not say: I announce to you a great, strange, wonderful work or history, which they do not know whether to receive or be glad of or not; for they, as poor common people, would not think, when anything special or great happens or is told, that it concerns them, or that God would do anything great for them, "but," says he, "I announce and bring to you good tidings" of joy only, and that not common, but "great joy;" and this joy not of great riches, power, liberty, and a quiet or easy life on earth, but of a new birth. This must not be one of these common old births, as all emperors and kings were born, where the birth of neither brought consolation and health to the other in his necessity, because we are born in sin unto death, but I speak of such a new, consoling, joyful birth, "that to you is born a Savior." This birth alone should and can cause you real and great joy, because through sin the devil has cast us men down very low, and

brought us into great distress and misery, so that we are not only sinners by nature, and subject to eternal death, but must also daily in this world expect all manner of misfortune from him, so that hardly any one is secure against him for one moment, either in his life or property. He even rules in the world by nothing but murder, persecution of the pious, lies, deceit, robbery, stealing, etc. Besides such distress there is also this, of which the gospel often speaks, that he enters bodily into people and makes them foolish and mad, to say nothing of the spiritual injury that he does by false doctrines; by filling people's minds with error and nonsense; contempt for God's Word, making them rave loudly against the truth, and filling them with pride, avarice, lasciviousness, hatred, envy, etc., so that we may truly say that such a man is nothing, but a foul secret retreat of the devil. So shamefully has he reduced us by sin, that here on earth we cannot have a bit of bread in safety on account of him, and must suffer his torments in body and soul, and in addition, bear God's wrath and eternal death. Is not this a terrible, miserable, horrible kingdom of the devil?

Yet, if we rightly think of it, and compare the two together, this distress which we have from the devil is by no means to be compared with the glory, and the precious treasure and joy; of which the angel here preaches and says: "Fear not; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy; to you is born a Savior." With such a proclamation the angel would turn our eyes and hearts away from such devil's misery, and direct them to this Child; as though the work of a precious and salutary preacher would be accomplished if he could bring us to contemplate this Savior rightly and learn to acknowledge Him as our flesh and blood. And it is certainly true, if we could rightly engrave this lovely, joyful image in man's heart, the comfort and joy from this our Savior would infinitely outweigh all the sorrow and injury which we have from the devil, though it be a great and eternal injury.

If we would gain the victory over the devil with all his venom and wrath, hell and death, and be secured against him, it must be done only by this sweet contemplation and comfort, of which the angel here preaches and says: "To you is born a Savior." If this truth is properly written in our hearts, the cause is already won. For with these words the angel would put such thoughts into our hearts: The devil has brought to shame and possessed me and all men, has brought us under God's wrath and into eternal damnation. This, alas! is true; but the injury is not so great that the

treasure which God gives me is not inexpressibly greater; namely, that God my Lord not merely possesses the human race, or dwells therein, as the devil is wont to possess men; but He Himself becomes true man, so that the divine and human nature in Christ becomes one person. So near the devil cannot come to man. For although he may possess a man, yet the man remains man and the devil remains the devil; they are two distinct persons and natures. On the other hand, the Son of God hath taken upon Him human nature, so that I can truly say: This Man is God, and God is Man, in one undivided person.

Therefore our gracious God in heaven, from inexpressible love and mercy to the human family, has come much nearer to our wretched human nature, so despised and so greatly marred by the devil, and has entered much deeper into our flesh than the devil can. He may take possession of a man and torture a man, but he cannot become a personal man; the natures always remain separate; but through the joyful birth of this Child, God has united Himself in one person with our human nature, and the Son of God is truly our flesh and blood, born of the Virgin Mary, in a natural manner, just as you and I were, excepting that He was conceived of the Holy Ghost without male seed, and did not inherit the venom of the devil, but received an altogether pure and innocent flesh and blood. With this one exception, our flesh and blood being impure and sinful, He is a man like you and me, who had to eat, drink, sleep, and awake, as other people must do by nature, as St. Paul says, (Phil. 2:7.): “He was made in the likeness of men,” so that whoever heard or saw Him had to say: This is verily a real, natural man, and no spirit. For He has in Himself all the characteristics of this natural life.

Behold, this is a beautiful, heavenly sermon of the angel, in which he promises us only joy and consolation from this birth, and would make of it something high and great, and present to our imagination the great honor that is shown us in this birth, and immediately make us proud of it in faith and heartfelt consolation, though at the same time very humble, when we are conscious of our wrong and misery, and contemplate the infinitely great love of God toward us unworthy creatures, who were the devil’s own. For he would hereby say as much as this: O, dear men! now rejoice and be glad. You have an exceedingly high and precious treasure, and honor and glory immeasurably great have been shown you, after all the shame and disgrace

which the devil has heaped upon you. For now you have lived to see a Man who is of your flesh and blood, and yet true God, the Lord of majesty, above all angels and creatures. Instead of the misery and wretchedness with which the devil afflicted you, you shall now have pure delight and pleasure, and, through this divine work, be sufficiently avenged of the evil spirit, and be much more highly honored than he could before disgrace and ruin you; nay, you are much more highly exalted than we angels are. With this you ought of right to console yourselves, and see to it, that you heartily lay hold of this, and rejoice in it. Nay, you cannot rejoice so heartily and greatly, but that the treasure and cause of your joy should still be much higher and greater, compared with which everything on earth which you men call great, must be nothing; so that this must be called a great joy, and I do not know what else to call it. For it shall be an infinite, eternal, immeasurable joy, which will outweigh all height, greatness, and all temporal and transient things, and cannot be designated otherwise than by the word great.

Now we also ought to learn to believe this preaching; for here we hear an excellent preacher, who rightly understands this great and glorious work of God, and knows very well how to speak of it. For he knows right well what great harm the devil has done; but he also sees and herewith confesses how we poor men, by the birth of this Child, are honored far above the angelic nature.

According to his created nature the devil is also of the same angelic essence. But by pride he has fallen from his first glory into enmity with God, and did not, as the Apostle Jude says in his epistle, keep his first estate, and afterwards brought the human race to destruction also, so that he neither will nor can be converted to God or reconciled with man. The other holy angels, who continue in their purity and obedience, do not need this benefit for themselves. And although they have not this honor of the Son of God in their nature, they do not envy us the same; nay, it is their highest joy that we have attained to it, and are no more the devil's own, but children of God, and co-heirs of the only begotten Son of God, so that, they can now be our fellows and we theirs. They are not ashamed to preach this to the poor shepherds and to the whole world, but regard it also as their happiness, and do it with heartfelt joy and pleasure, so that not only one proclaims this, but after the proclamation the whole host of them sing about it with a joyful noise, and desire that heaven and earth should be full of this joy.

Now if we would rightly consider and take this to heart, we men ought to love and esteem each other heartily, even if we had no other gain from it. For I do not yet speak of the use and benefit, of which the angel speaks in the following words: “To you is born a Savior,” but only of the honor. Yes, if we would rightly take this to heart, we could never be the enemy of any man; for who would hate or harm that image, that has a body and soul like my God and thine? Should we not, for the sake of this honor that God has shown us, love all men and do good to them?

The angels are created much more glorious creatures than we are: but God did not regard this and become an angel. In addition to this, the angels are also innocent and pure, holy spirits, who have not fallen like the other angels and us poor men. Thus it might seem that it would have been much more fit if God had become an angel. But no, He interferes in behalf of the insignificant, poor creature, full of sins, in the kingdom of the devil, which the devil plagues and torments most shamefully. Should not this soften our hearts a little, that we should heartily love one another, and not despise and envy each other, but each show the other all manner of love and friendship, for the sake of this high honor and glory to which we are exalted in our Savior, the Son of God?

Several of the fathers, and especially Bernard, had such thoughts as these, that the devil, when he saw in heaven that the Son of God would become man, began to envy men and hate God, because He was not about to become an angel, but a man, and therefore out of pride and envy fell from heaven. This may indeed be a good thought, and we may infer from this work of God that the devil’s fall was a sin against the Son of God. But the dear fathers wanted in this way to present the great honor and inexpressible benefit of God, displayed toward us in that God became man, took upon Him the poor flesh and blood that we poor men have, who have been poisoned and taken possession of by the devil through sin, and are on account of sin subject to death.

How unhappy must those people be who know nothing of this honor! But how much more unhappy those who hear from the angels, apostles and other preachers, that God has thus graciously visited our humanity, taken it upon Himself, and exalted it above all creatures, but do not regard it, nor receive any pleasure from it! Yes, truly unhappy and unblessed must such people be, who do not feel this, and derive no comfort nor joy from it. But

"What shall we say of those who even slander, condemn and persecute this blessed doctrine?"

If among many brethren one becomes a great lord, how do the other brothers rejoice! How great the pleasure they have in this! As we see in the case of Joseph's brethren in the book of Genesis, where he makes himself known to them. But how does it come that we do not also rejoice in this inexpressible honor and glory, that it does not move our hearts to praise and thank God that His Son has become flesh and blood, and now sits at the right hand of God, the Lord over all creatures?

Whoever could rightly conceive of this in his heart, should for the sake of the flesh and blood that is above, at the right hand of God, love all flesh and blood here upon earth and never be capable of being angry with any one any more. One view of the tender humanity of Christ our God, should reasonably so fill our hearts with joy, that no angry or unfriendly thoughts could ever afterward find place within them. Yes, we might almost expect every one to carry the other on his hands for joy, on account of this our flesh and blood. Whoever has rightly thought of it in his heart that the Son of God has become man, should also be able to expect all good from the Lord Jesus, and nothing ill. For I know very well that I am not angry with myself, and do not wish to do myself any evil. But Christ is the same as I am, also a true man; how then can he intend to do any evil to Himself, that is to us, who are His flesh and blood? And, to sum up the matter, this fact that the Son of God became man, if we had the proper image of it in our hearts, would make only joyful hearts and consciences, and in a moment all the terrible examples of God's wrath, like the flood; the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and others, would melt away and disappear. All these must vanish in one moment if we would with believing hearts think of this one man who is God, and has so honored poor human nature. For in this image I can see nothing else that has induced Him to take upon Him human nature, than only great, inexpressible love towards us, who before had lain under the wrath of God, condemned to eternal death.

But as already said, are those not altogether unhappy people, who hear, but do not regard this, letting this treasure lie, and engaging in questions as to how they shall fill their chests with gold, build grand houses, and appear in great pomp and despise, envy and hate their neighbor? It is the miserable devil who does this, to whom those people who do not regard God's Word

give place in their hearts; who blinds them, so that they cannot see this joy of which the angel here preaches.

Now this is one point that should move us to great joy and a blessed pride, that we are honored thus above all creatures, even above the angels, so that we can of a truth boast: My own flesh and blood sits at the right hand of God and rules over all. No creature nor angel has such honor. This should indeed be an oven to melt us all into one heart, and to awaken such fervor among us, that we would all love one another heartily. But, as we said, here the devil has his work, so that we hear this truth in the Church, but afterward do not think further of it, and soon forget it. He deprives us of this joy by suggesting other thoughts and cares, in order that we may not embrace this image in our hearts as we should. Now, if we had no more than this honor, we ought to leap and dance for joy.

But over and above this natural joy in this honor and glory, there is this yet of which the angel farther says, that this child Jesus would also be our Savior. This is the chief part, and brings to notice the true reason why we should be joyful. Here again there are unhappy and unblessed persons who hear and know it, and yet do not regard it. For these words should melt heaven and earth, and change for us death into sugar, and all misfortunes, of which there are here more than can be told, into pure, sweet wine. For what man is there who can properly conceive of this, that the Son of God is born man, a Savior for us? Such treasure the angel gives not only to His mother, the Virgin Mary, but to all of us men; “unto you,” he says, “is born a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” For the angel speaks to the shepherds; these were Jews, and well knew that the word Christ in their language meant a King and Lord. But herein the greater part of the Jews erred, in that they thought He would be a Lord and Savior in a temporal sense. This was not meant. The angel refers to something higher when he says: “Unto you is born a Savior.” As though he would say: Hitherto you have been the prisoners of the devil; He has tormented you with water, fire, pestilence, the sword, and who can tell all the misfortunes? But the greatest of all was this eternal distress, sin and death. Here you poor men are lying under his tyranny. He leads the soul astray with lies, which are infinitely more hurtful to it than any pestilence can be to the body. Nor has the poor, weak, needy body any rest from him. And when He has tormented soul and body here on earth, eternal death comes in afterwards. Now unto you, says the angel, who lie as

captives in the power of this destructive, wicked, venomous spirit, who is the prince and god of this world, without salvation or help for either your bodies or souls, this Savior is born.

Yes, the words unto you should make us joyful. For to whom, or of whom, does He speak? Of course not to wood or stones; no, but to men; and not to one or two alone, but as He says, to “all people,” that is, all who are men. For He says, unto you, not unto us angels, but “unto you” He is born, that is, He has become a man like unto you. Now whoever is born a man, may and should comfort himself with this Savior who is born. But what shall we make of this? Shall we still doubt God’s grace and say: St. Peter or St. Paul may indeed rejoice in this Savior; but I am a poor sinner, I dare not do it, this noble precious treasure is not intended for me? My dear friend, if you will say it is not for me, to whom then does it belong? Did He come for the sake of geese, ducks or cows? For you must notice what He is. Had He wished to help another creature, He would have become that creature. Had He not become man for the sake of us poor, sinful, lost men, He would not be called our Savior. Now see, what are you? What am I? Are we not all men? Yes. Who then is to receive this Child, but just we men? The angels do not need Him; the devils do not want Him; but we need Him, and for our sake He became man. Therefore it becomes us men to receive Him with joy, as the angel here says: “Unto you is born a Savior;” and shortly before: “I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people.” But is it not a great and glorious thing, that an angel from heaven brings this message to men? And afterwards so many thousand angels rejoice about it, wish and announce that we men also should be joyful, and receive such grace with thanks, as we shall hear.

Therefore it is a very precious word which we hear: “Unto you is born the Savior.” This birth, he would say, is not for us angels; I have no share in it, except that I am glad with you and for you, who are poor, depraved and lost men. This Child, the Son of God, is your Savior; you are to be helped from sin and death. Now it is in itself a great and glorious thing that God has become man. But this is far more, that He is to be our spiritual and eternal Savior. Whoever would rightly believe this, could tell what true joy is. Yes, if his heart were full of this faith, he could, for great joy, not live long; for his heart could not bear the joy, but must break; as we see that the

heart of man cannot endure great sorrow, but many die of great terror and anxiety.

But, as was said in the beginning, here on earth we will not be able fully to comprehend or learn this sermon. For this life is too narrow and our hearts are too weak. Otherwise, if it were possible that a heart should take it in fully, it would never have any more sorrowful thoughts.

And, if we rightly believed these tidings, this fruit at least should follow, that we would be kind to each other, and leave off lying and deceiving and other vices. But here we see how feeble we are; this joy cannot find a proper entrance into our hearts; we soon forget the preaching both of the angel and of the Savior, and the majority of men still run after avarice and other like things, which is a sure indication that we do not regard such preaching or that our faith is too weak; for we would be joyful and free from care, if we believed that we have such a Savior.

How would one rejoice in the danger and agony of death, if he knew a certain remedy against the pestilence? But in this Savior from sin and eternal death no one rejoices, or at best but few. The greater part seek other pleasures, that they may have peace, rest, luxury, etc. here; and yet they are not sure of this life for one moment. This is a sign that we hear this joyful proclamation like those who are in a sleep, remain wicked people who have the treasure before their eyes, but do not regard it.

Now, whoever hears this without experiencing any consolation or joy, may well regard himself as an unhappy man. For in what shall a heart rejoice, if not in that of which the angel here speaks and which He Himself calls great joy, so that it must indeed be a joy above all joys: "This day is born to you a Savior?" Whoever will not permit himself to be bettered or made more pious by this announcement, whoever can not relish this wine, nor feel the warmth of this fire in his heart, him let the hangman make more pious, for there is no other way to help him.

Therefore be alarmed on your own account, if you are thus cold and hardened, and earnestly call upon God for grace, that through His Holy Spirit He would change and warm your heart; then place before you this sermon of the angel, think and meditate upon the inexpressible benefit which God confers upon and announces to you through this birth; in order that thereby your heart may be awakened both to repentance and the fear of

God, and to faith which comforts itself in this Savior. For God is willing to work in us and give us His Holy Spirit through such preaching and contemplation of His Word.

When the angel further says that “this Savior is born in the city of David,” and calls Him “the Lord,” with these words he would direct us to the Scriptures. For thus it had been foretold by the prophet Micah that He should be born in Bethlehem.

But especially does the angel call the Child “Jesus, the Lord.” We are not to understand this as though He should be a worldly king, who should show himself to be a tyrant, ruling with the rod of physical power; no, but as God says to Adam: “The seed of the woman shall crush the head of the serpent,” so He is to appear before us the devil’s enemy, but our Lord and Savior, who will claim you and me as His own, demand us of the devil, say to him: Give me this man whom you hold bound; he is not yours, but mine, and my creature, whom I not only created, but also purchased with my body and blood. Therefore let him go, give him to me again, for he does not belong to you. So that Christ is a Lord rich in consolation, with power breaking in upon the government of the devil and claiming His own, appearing before his very eyes and saying: Thou, accursed spirit, hast led them into sin and death, deceivest and beliest them, and yet they are not thine. I am the Lord, who am entitled not only by nature, but also by right, to govern men; not you; for they are my purchased property.

Yes, say you, but the Son of God has not redeemed the angels; how then are we to explain it thus when they call Him Lord? Answer: For us the word has no other sense, and it is rightly and properly explained thus. But the fact that the angel speaks thus in a general way, and gives the child Jesus such a high title, is a sure indication that this child, born bodily of the Virgin Mary, is natural, true, eternal God; else of course the angel would not call Him Lord.

He is our Savior, not the Savior of the angels; as the angel here plainly says: “Unto you is born a Savior.” But He is not only our Lord; He is also the angels’ Lord. Now they are of the household of this Lord, with us, and we with them, and count themselves as being under this Lord just like us, so that we men, who were formerly the devil’s servants, attain to such honor through this Child, that we are received into citizenship of the dear angels.

These are now our dear friends, so that for the sake of this Child we can trust that we have one Lord with the dear angels and they with us, and that we are with them of the same household.

They, the dear angels, might well be proud that they are so much nobler than we men, in the first place as to their nature and being, and then also in that they are without sin. But we see in them no pride; they do not despise us men on account of our misery; nay, they regard us as being greatly ennobled and honored through this their Lord and our Savior, the Son of God. They are heartily sorry for our death, sin and distress. Therefore also they so heartily rejoice in this help which comes to us in this Child, are willing that we should have this blessedness as well as themselves, that on this day we have received this Child for our own, who is their Lord, and confers upon us the high honor, that we are to be their companions.

They do not say: I do not like this sinner, this stinking corpse, these condemned, unclean whoremongers and profligates. No, they do not say thus; but they rejoice heartily that they now have such sinners for friends and associates, and praise God for this, that we, being delivered from sin, come with them unto one house and under one Lord. They thank and praise God for such grace, which however they did not need for themselves, except that hereby their joy is made greater, and God has the more praise and honor, as they afterwards sing.

How much more is it not meet that we also should thank and praise God therefore, and love and help one another, even as the Son of God did us, who became our flesh and nearest Friend. But whoever will not regard this, and will not thus love and serve his neighbor, for Him, as said above, there is no help.

This is the first sermon about this Child after His birth, which will be continued even unto the end of the world; therefore you should diligently take heed to it. For here you see how the dear angels have become one with us, are our friends, come to us with this joyful message, and still continue to comfort us therewith and say: henceforth we ought no more to fear, since this Child is born unto us, and will be our Savior. This is the true, highest and best consolation, which can surely and truly prove to us God's grace and mercy, that God the almighty, eternal Father has had compassion upon us and given us His Son in such a friendly manner, through a tender virgin.

He lays Him in her bosom, and lets the announcement be made to us that He is our Savior. What we want, we are to find in Him. He is to be our help and comfort, that henceforth all wrath between God and us is taken away, and only love and kindness reigns.

Now ask yourself, does God do injustice when He suffers those to be lost forever who hear this and do not accept of it, as the blind, hardened Papists do, who are not satisfied with this Savior, but run after other saviors on whom to depend? The sermon of this angel sounds differently; namely, that this Child alone is to be our Savior, in whom alone, as our highest treasure, we are to have all our comfort and joy. Where He is, thither look all the angels, and God Himself.

But He gives this treasure not only to His mother, but to you and me too, and says: He shall be your own, you shall enjoy Him, and everything that He has in heaven and earth, shall be your own. Now whoever hears this and yet derives not pleasure from it, or lets this Savior go and seeks another, deserves to be driven into the earth by a thunderbolt. Therefore we should thank God for His grace, and pray Him that He would write this sermon of the angel into our hearts, in order that we may find our consolation in this Savior, and through Him conquer death and the devil.

To this may our dear Lord and Savior, Christ, help us. Amen.

Third Sermon For Christmas. The Comport To Be Derived From The Tidings Of The Angel, With An Admonition.

Now that we have heard the glad and glorious tidings of the angel, concerning the birth of the Lord our Savior, it behooves us to see to it that this proclamation may not have been heard by us as though it were a story of every day life, which when once heard satisfies us, since then we know all that need be known concerning it. Alas, the greater portion of mankind thus hears the Word of God, regarding it no more than human sayings, the mere hearing of which is sufficient. We ought rather to be such hearers and learners as the angel admonishes not only the shepherds to be, but all men, for whom the Savior is born, so that our hearts may with great joy accept and retain the message of this birth. Thus, indeed, we see the entire multitude of holy angels rejoicing, and gladly singing of this deed of God, although it did not happen on their account. Thus also the shepherds do; they are not content with having seen and heard the angels, but immediately, and yet by night, in order that they might so much the more rejoice at this story, go to seek and to find the little Child in the manger, whereby they receive consolation and happiness, and increase these to such a degree that, wherever they go, they repeat these tidings with much joy, and from their hearts give thanks unto God and praise Him for these things. Mary also, the mother of this little Child, as the Evangelist tells us, with much joy “kept all these things” and pondered them in her heart.

Such hearers of these tidings God desires us to be. In no other way can they be advantageously or happily heard. Those persons must surely be unhappy and accursed, as has been stated above, who derive from these

Christmas-tidings neither joy nor a desire to amend their lives, and who no more believe them nor derive benefit from them than does the devil with his angels, who also know these events full well, but only to their condemnation.

With these tidings the angel has given us so much, that the entire Church has enough in them to preach and to learn until the end of time. It is certainly proper, and also highly necessary for us, to study them with care, and by diligent contemplation so impress them upon our hearts and ponder them, that we will never forget them, thus making many a sermon from this one glorious sermon of the angel. It contains so much of fire and fuel that it is able, at all times, to ignite and warm afresh our cold hearts; yea, it is such a spring and fountain, that it can always assuage our panting and quench our thirst, as a living stream of water unto eternal life. In this we have both a sure comfort and defense against all affliction and fear, as well as the necessary admonition to shun a false security and to avoid forgetfulness of this great and divine blessing.

All this, however, is comprised in that saying of the angel which we have heard: "For unto you is born this day a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." This is the chief treasure which causes joy, truly great and heartfelt, to all those who desire to be happy; that is, to possess the grace of God, peace of conscience, and the sure hope of eternal life. To such the angel speaks and says: Fear not. For to whom else could these words be said? or why should God through these tidings of a Savior born exhort to joy fullness, if they were not spoken to such hearts as are miserable, sad, without cheer or joy, and engulfed in tribulations, fears and despondency, as though God were still angry with them and about to hurl them into the abyss of hell, with which the saints and pious hearts are ever and anon troubled? For these feel their sin, their conscience accuses them, and they know that they cannot be acquitted before the judgment-seat of God, Sin is the principal cause of all terror and fear of God; for if we were free from it we would not need to fear the wrath to come, nor death and hell; nor would we attempt to flee from God. With our timid, sad and wavering heart we confess ourselves guilty, as indeed we are, and are unable, on account of our sins, to approach God, from which fear no power on earth can free us. The wicked may perhaps, for the time being, not experience this feeling on account of the obduracy of their hearts, yet neither are they entirely free

from it, and it will unexpectedly come upon them, to hurl them with the force of thunder and lightning into the abyss of hell. The pious, however, will constantly be burdened and troubled by it, and can find no relief in themselves; nor can anything on earth comfort them when this terror is upon them; for it arises from their own heart and conscience, which feel the wrath of God. Such a condition as this will bring about despair, and death and hell will prevail if Christ, with His Word, bring not consolation and light into the cheerless heart. Hence no one can find relief in the pleasures of the world, nor in external, temporal possessions. For all these are, in themselves, not pure nor permanent, but always contain more gall than honey, the highest pleasure of this kind being mixed with discontent and ending at last in bitterness.

Another consolation must be sought; it is not found on earth among men, but cometh down from heaven and is revealed alone in this Child. This is pointed out to us by this heavenly preacher; not, however, as the Jews expected to hear the tidings of their Messiah, which would have been to this effect: “Unto you is born this day your King and Lord, who bringeth you much gold and worldly pleasures, as your heart desires.” No, he declares: To those I do not preach, who find their happiness in these things, but otherwise are free from fear, who know and feel naught of the terror of the wrath of God, nor of the dread of hell. Unto you, humble shepherds and your kin, disconsolate in your wretched conscience, seeking aid in such distress, which none on earth, neither with money nor with wealth, nor aught else of this world, can grant, that you might be happy and rejoice in God, – unto you I preach. Yea, unto you I am sent to bring the tidings that now you have a Savior, that now your heart may be glad and leap for joy. Unto you He is born, and as the prophet Isaiah (chap. 9) saith, “Unto you He is given;” He shall and will be yours entirely; your Savior indeed, who will free you from all the fear, terror and distress which have overwhelmed you.

Judge now for thyself from this announcement of the angel, how God in heaven, full of majesty, approached thee; how, through boundless love and compassion for thy great misery and woe, without any merit of thine own, while thou wast in sin, He sent down His only begotten Son, born of a virgin, telling thee: Behold, this is my beloved Son, born and given for thee, to be thy Savior, comfort, aid, defense and happiness. Judge, I say, from this

as to the disposition of God toward thee. Ask thyself the question, whether thou or any other man (who are all unjust and sinful) wouldst or couldst wish within thy heart that death, or any injury, might befall the person to whom thou givest thine own and only child, with all his heritage. Surely not; he must be a person in whom thou wouldst have confidence and to whom thou wouldst feel thyself much attached; for a father would much rather confide to another his wealth and all that he possesses than his own child. We therefore see in the Son of God, born and given unto us, the unspeakable love and mercy of God toward us. He is born and given to those who will accept Him, and who desire to rejoice and be comforted in Him. Through this great benefaction and gift God manifests to us, in the clearest manner, that He will no longer chide, nor condemn us.

Yet, in view of all this, the timorous heart will say: But I am not good; if I examine my life and judge by that, then the law of God crushes me, and my conscience accuses me, saying: I must be damned because I am a sinner and have not kept the law. To this objection the angel answered: Ah, it is well that thou seest and feelest this, for thus thou art well prepared to receive this consolation and joy which I proclaim. If thou wert no sinner, and didst not tremble, nor fear the wrath of God, thou wouldst not be in need of a Savior, and my tidings would benefit thee naught. Since thou hast opened thine eyes far enough to see who thou art, open now also thine ears and listen to what God through me announces to you. It is not necessary that He should now proclaim to thee that thou art full of sin and didst thereby merit hell, for this has been preached unto thee well nigh more than thou art able to bear; but He rather sends this message down from heaven, because from it alone thou canst learn how thy misery and agony may be removed. It behooves thee then to see another vision than that which thine own heart presents, and to hear another message than that which the law proclaims: That God by my Christmas-tidings points out to thee this Savior, His only begotten Son, clothed in thy flesh and blood and misery, adding this yet that He was born for thee. Hither then incline thine ears, thine eyes and thy heart; speak no longer of what thou art, for God sees and knows that much better than thou. Hear this; and heed well what I now proclaim to you in the name of God: Thou shalt not fear, but be glad.

But, thou will say further, How can I know that God has become reconciled with me? I know that His law must be fulfilled, or else His

eternal wrath against my disobedience must be borne; this must surely be first appeased; how shall I accomplish this? Very well, what wilt thou do? Wilt thou run to the ends of the earth? Wilt thou become a strict Carthusian, (the most stringent order of monks) or an hermit? or wilt thou torment thyself to death with fastings and other extraordinary works? No, this would avail nothing! In spite of all these penances thou wouldst remain the same as before; yea, thou wouldst even become more miserable and more woe-begone. God's wrath can not be met nor appeased by any human works, since these are not able to expel or to remove the sin which is born in man.

Whither then shall I flee for comfort and assistance? Hither, says the angel; listen to what I tell thee. I bring thee these tidings which thou must eagerly and firmly grasp, and which will make thee glad. My message does not demand of thee good works, through which thou mightest obtain salvation, but simply tells thee that thy Savior is born. This word Savior gives thee what thou needest; for with it is joined that little word your, that is, a Savior for you and all mankind. Thou and thine are the accursed and the damned, who need a Savior. They, the holy angels, are pure, incorrupt, pious and happy spirits; hence the angel does not say: Our Savior is born, but your Savior, born for you, that is such as confess and say: I am lost.

These tidings, however, require faith which accepts them as true, and firmly holds, against all doubts, that the Savior is surely born. This faith quiets the heart, so that thou wilt not charge God with falsehood through thy unbelief, as they do who refuse to believe and thus lose their Savior. Where this faith is wanting, Christ, as the Son of God, is denied by those who will not confess their sins, nor acknowledge Him as their Savior, as well as by those who feel their condemnation and confess their guilt, but do not faithfully receive the consolation that Christ is their Savior.

Consider well what thou dost in this regard. If thou wilt not have this Savior, but fanciest that thou canst be thine own savior, or that some one else can save thee, then go on: ere long thou wilt discover thy mistake. If thou, however, confessest that thou art in need of this Savior, but wilt not trust the declaration of the angel, preferring to torment thyself with thy sins, and to wait until thou canst free thyself from them, then thou doest greatly err and deprivest thyself of thy comfort and joy. If thou couldst help thyself, the angel would have to make another announcement, and would have to style thee, or other men, the Savior, not Christ.

The chief thing needed in this respect is a full and confident acceptance of this little Child, as it is shown unto us by these tidings, lying in the arms of the virgin or in the manger, and that a timid heart should thus forget its own sin and fear and weakness. Thus also saith St. Paul; Rom. 8: “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”

In these words St. Paul explains these tidings of the angel and derives great comfort from them. God delivers up for us His only begotten Son, that He should become a sacrifice for us, and bear the severe wrath of God which we had merited, yea, that He should pay our debt with His own person and life, that we might obtain grace and eternal life. Now the Son of God is greater, more beautiful, nobler and worthier than the sun and the moon and all the world with its possessions, and is dearer to the Father than any living creature. If He then delivers up for us the Son, He surely giveth in Him everything that He can give, and accepts us in Christ as His children, regards us as His heirs, and bestows upon us salvation, dominion, and victory over sin, death and hell, which treasures the Son of God possesses in His person from all eternity, and now has merited and achieved for us through His death and resurrection. In a word, the name Son of God conveys to us everything that the Father has; for that which is the Father’s pertains also to the Son. If we therefore credit these tidings of the angel, we surely have in Him and with Him the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life, and the grace and the mercy and paternal love of God are upon us.

If then thou shouldst feel terror on account of thy sin, if the devil should trouble and pain thee with sadness and depression of spirits, do but firmly cling to this message of the angel, and from it learn to say assuredly: I have now heard long enough what my distressed and guilty conscience according to the law of God tells me of my sins and of the wrath of God, and thou meddlesome devil, with thy charges, hast long enough made these errors so stupendous before me that I could see and hear nothing else, and hast caused me to have such fear and terror in my heart, as though I could have no hope at all and God were no longer gracious and merciful. Such thoughts cannot be of God. On the contrary, thanks be to God, I hear the declaration of this angel which God has sent by him for the desponding and terrified hearts (as the words “Fear not” indicate): “Unto you a Savior is born,” that is, God’s wrath, damnation and eternal death shall no longer threaten you,

but rather, through the obedience of the Son of God, who is born for you, there is prepared for you reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sins, and everlasting salvation and freedom from all that oppresses and saddens your hearts. To make this sure, the angel adds in full the words: “For behold I bring you good tidings of great joy,” etc., by which he orders me, in the name of God, to dismiss all fear and mourning, and to resist the doubts of my flesh and blood. It is my duty faithfully to accept these tidings and to be comforted by them; for I know that they are God’s word and will. Whatever else is told me, in opposition to this, I shall not believe, but will condemn it as a lie of the devil, who desires by means of my own heart and thoughts to frighten and seduce me away from my Savior, so that I also, like Satan, can have no joy nor comfort in this blessed birth.

From this follows, that all downcast hearts, which tremble at the wrath of God and are thus broken and crushed, and which torture themselves with their own thoughts, and seek relief from their suffering in themselves or in others, should learn to judge such thoughts and to ward them off, as poisonous and fiery darts of Satan, through that faith which accepts these tidings concerning Christ. The conclusion and confession will be: It is true, I know it well, that I am a poor sinner; but from this does not follow that Christ was not born for me and my salvation: that I should not be comforted and rejoice at this birth nor regard it as my own treasure, or that I should remain in fear and trembling lest God should for ever chide and finally condemn me; this is thy story, thou doleful liar of hell. God Himself speaks to me otherwise, through this angel at the manger. He says: I shall no longer fear nor be sad, since my Savior is born, since God gives me His well-beloved Son, and invites me at this birth to hear naught but what brings joy and cheer, of which the angel and the heavenly host, with a loud and happy anthem, are heralds to me and to all people. It is indeed an unspeakable blessing of my Father in heaven, that He has caused this to be proclaimed to me, that I might thus recognize His love and purpose. It is therefore my duty firmly to believe this and to manifest my gratitude; for I know that such tidings can not be false, that there could be no greater contempt or blasphemy of God than to doubt their truthfulness, or to reject them. Such doubts of God’s Word come from thee, thou accursed devil, and it is thy endeavor to make us poor human beings also guilty of such blasphemy.

Through these tidings of the angel the Holy Spirit desires to be efficacious in us, and surely if the heart accepts them there is a power in them to work consolation and such joy, that the insinuations of the devil, the fear of death, and shuddering and terror of conscience can be overcome, so that faith can joyfully boast with St. Paul: "If God has given me His own Son, how should He not with Him give me all things." If I possess the Son, who proceedeth from the Father, then I will have the Father also and all His blessings, nor can hell, nor the devil, nor death, nor any misfortune deprive me of such treasure, as St. Paul continues to say, Rom. 8: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

That this consolation is true and sure we Christians do not doubt in the least, since we know that God sent His angels from heaven to preach it and to admonish us to rejoice in it.* God has furthermore, borne witness to this with many convincing testimonies, but principally through this greatest deed of all that He clothed His own Son in our nature. Christ our Savior Himself became a witness of this and ratified it by His sufferings and death. No one can be deprived of this comfort unless he fails to receive it in faith, and thus puts it from him; for this gift of grace and life in this new-born infant, the Son of God, is eternal, and endures as long as the Son of God, and His Father everlasting. Therefore whosoever has Him will also live in eternity. Although, on account of our weakness and natural infirmity, we may now and then lose sight of this truth, and be troubled with doubts and despondency, let us ever strive to lay hold of it again, and never follow the example of those who deny and blaspheme such divine grace and heavenly treasure.

How miserable is the condition of that man who cannot hear these tidings I yet how much more unhappy he who hears them without appropriating them to himself! That such conduct can not be pleasing in the sight of God, and that such gift can not be in the possession of him who disregards it, even human reason, when instructed as to the contents of these tidings, must acknowledge. We hear at the present time, all over the world, much and great lamentation on account of the many fearful visitations upon countries and peoples; every one complains of "hard times," oppression, and other tribulations; but no one seems to be aware of the cause of all this. Is it, indeed, a wonder that such, yea, and even much greater punishments, come upon us when we bear in mind the prevailing

blasphemous contempt and ingratitude towards God in return for the unspeakable kindness and mercy which He has manifested toward us in His glorious gospel? Surely it would be no wonder if God would permit the infidels and all other plagues to come upon us, or if He would hurl us back into the darkness and tyranny of popery and other forms of sectarianism. Let us suppose that thou hadst, with all possible self-denial and sacrifice of health and property, aided certain persons, rescuing them from certain death, and that they, in return, would have nothing to do with thee, even insulting thee in every possible manner, causing thee all kinds of vexations, wouldst thou commiserate them if they were visited by all sorts of punishment, if they with their families were cut to pieces by their enemies, if their wives and children were shamefully abused, if all their property were destroyed? Yet, we suppose that God must always be patient with us, and even dare to charge Him with wrong-doing if He visits us with punishments, thereby calling us to repentance, while we never think of acknowledging His beneficence and mercy, nor of being grateful to Him, but rather continue in our shameful disregard of Him and in our wicked, lawless life.

We rejoice if He gives us corn and wine, gold and riches, although we shamefully forget to thank Him even for these gifts, and the world abuses them scandalously; but on account of the greatest of all gifts, His only begotten Son, born of a virgin for us and bringing us all grace and blessings, we will not rejoice, nor honor Him by giving the tidings a respectful hearing. What further kindnesses should we then expect of Him?

Surely, we have no reason to despise such a kind, faithful and beneficent Lord, but we ought rather to love Him as our dear Father with our whole heart, with all fidelity and obedience, and to be grateful to Him. Since we do not do this He has abundant reason to permit the devil and all calamities to torment us. I would sooner be pierced by the dagger of the Turk than to be compelled to observe, on all sides, such great neglect and terrible refusal of these divine gifts and treasures.

Even if the Son of God, born of a virgin, had not been given thee of God, and thou shouldst observe a Turkish or Herodian murderer ready to destroy this infant, thou oughtest to interfere and say: Pierce and cut me and all of us to pieces, only spare this Child. But what else is our rejection of this Savior, given and born for us, than piercing Him as with a sword and spear,

as the epistle to the Hebrews clearly tells us, in the 6. chapter: "Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.

In view of this we must confess: Righteous are the judgments of God, and well merited by the world are His punishments. It cannot be otherwise than that through neglecting and despising these happy tidings, and this greatest of all blessings, the Son of God, the world deprives itself of its chief treasure, comfort, aid and happiness, and thereby, on the other hand, brings upon itself devils on every side, the despotism of wicked principalities, the pope, murder, war and the destruction of all good governments, as well as every kind of tribulation. What greater love could God show us than to send His Son into our flesh and blood, therewith giving us, and all creatures, the strongest guarantee and testimonial of His grace and love, thus smiling upon us as our best friend, yea, as our most kind Father; and what could more powerfully prompt us to become pious, obedient and grateful?

Let us therefore take heed, not to disregard nor lose this grace, but rather to make a salutary application of the happy birth of Christ in our lives, to be comforted by it, and to realize this blessing with gratitude toward God for having granted unto us, through His Word, such a blessed revelation. Let us earnestly implore Him so to strengthen and preserve us in our faith, that this bright light may not become dim nor be taken from us, and that we may not relapse into our former blindness.

These angelic tidings were not lost under the dominion of the pope, and throughout all Germany was sung and is sung still on Christmas-day that charming hymn: "A little child so glorious," etc.; but no one understood its meaning, simply because there were no true and faithful preachers. Where the pulpit lies prostrate and snores in laziness, so that the gospel is not presented nor explained, there all singing and reading will be in vain, because it is done in ignorance. Surely we must admit that the Papists also had Baptism, the Sacrament, the text of the Gospel, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed and the Ten Commandments, as they have them even now, excepting that they changed the Lord's Supper and tampered with His Testament; but all this was dormant among them. They know not what they have, and derive no comfort from such treasures, as Christians should, but live on in utter indifference, without the slightest conception of the true meaning of

Baptism, the Gospel, the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. Hence they know not what they say or sing, but busy themselves with their buffooneries and juggleries, with their ceremonies and rituals, carrying on an extensive trade with their masses, consecrating salt and water, fumigating their altars, filling their churches with vocal and instrumental music, by all of which nobody is either instructed, or comforted, or converted. From their pulpits nothing can be heard but a blasphemous perversion and condemnation of the pure, saving and comfortable doctrine of 'Christ our Savior.

Where lies the trouble? It is evident that the preachers are at fault, whose duty it is to arouse the people, to open their ears and purify their sight, to preach with care and diligence the pure doctrine, that they may understand what they hear, read or sing. He, however, who desires to arouse others must himself be awake and active, or else it may easily happen that a drowsy preacher will cause even an attentive hearer to become sleepy also. See, what happened to the Romish church! There they sat in a garden filled with roses, in all ease and sumptuousness; both preacher and hearer slept and snored, so that they understood naught of these tidings of the angel, though, now and then, they sang and read concerning them.

In the Gospel they read how this Savior was born, and in their churches they sing: "If this Child had not been born, we would all have been forlorn," etc., and yet they go and call upon the Virgin Mary, fast, celebrate festivals in honor of the saints, do penance, order and hear mass, etc. Thus they make saviors unto themselves, perverting the Christmas-song by their deeds, substituting for this Child, our Savior, the Virgin Mary and other saints, yea, even their own poor, miserable, childish and foolish works.

The Jews, in a similar manner, also possessed the Holy Scripture, and read in their synagogues the declarations of the prophets concerning Christ, which speak plainly of His person and office, how He would not be an earthly king, but would become a sacrifice for the sins of men, having an eternal kingdom, in which all who should believe in Him would find through Him alone forgiveness of sin. Nevertheless, although this was plainly foretold, both priests and people retained their false opinion of the temporal kingdom of their Messiah, and imagined that they would become just in the sight of God by means of their Jewish ritualism and works of the law. Hence it is an urgent necessity to pray God with all earnestness that He may give unto us dutiful preachers who will, unceasingly, tell us of these

tidings and explain them, that they may not only be heard and read, but also understood.

Where such preachers are wanting, it will not be otherwise than it is among the Papists, who have the Word and Sacraments, but merely as one who has in his house a treasure hidden and unknown to him. The tidings of the angel are, moreover, sufficiently plain and intelligible in themselves; but for the pope and his followers they are a mystery, else they would not teach the people to call upon the saints, to depend upon and to purchase human works and merits, and to seek other saviors, but they would point to the true and only Savior.

Wherever there are, by the mercy of God, faithful and active preachers, who bring these words nigh unto the hearts of their hearers, there the precious gift to distinguish false teachers and spirits will not be wanting; and the Christian hearers will be enabled to recognize full well the devil in his various dealings, no matter how strangely he may disguise himself, or how cunning and deceitful he may be, as St. Paul says, 2. Cor. 2: "For we are not ignorant of his devices." If we compare the teachings of the Jews, the Turks, the pope, or any other false doctrine, with the tidings of the angel, we can easily learn that their teachings are untrue, their faith unfounded and their worship nugatory. The Papists clothe their service in great external splendor, adding many grand and imposing performances; but it is evident that all this is but idolatry, since they regard such services as possessing a saving power. Upon these they depend for their justification, and by them they hope to merit heaven, whereas the angel tells us that this Child alone, and no other, is our Savior. Hence we can with truth charge the pope and his bishops with false doctrine and life, for neither their conduct nor their preaching corresponds to this message of the angel.

He who firmly holds to the doctrine contained in the tidings of our text, can judge the truth for himself, and will not err. May we be duly grateful to God for such revelations, and pray that He may so keep us in this faith, that we do not lose sight of this Child and His glorious light, whereby we are protected against the wiles of Satan and the allurements of the world, and qualified to pass judgment against all doctrines opposed to these tidings. May we never forget what the angel has told us: Not my works, nor thine, nor those of any other created being can save us. He directs us plainly to that Child of whom he speaks in these words: "Unto you is born this day a

Savior, which is Christ the Lord;” He has accomplished all that need be done for our salvation. This heavenly teacher I will believe, His tidings I will keep, and to no others conflicting with them will I hearken. Amen.

Fourth Sermon For Christmas. The Song Of Praise Of The Angels.

In the preceding sermons for this Festival, we considered first of all the Christmas-story itself, and saw how the Son of God was born of the Virgin Mary. This story was written, and is annually preached throughout the Christian Church, that we should become well acquainted with it, and be moved by it to give heartfelt thanks to God for His great mercy and condescension toward us, as manifested in the birth of His Son. We also considered the heavenly tidings of the angel proclaiming with great glory this birth to the shepherds upon the fields of Bethlehem, in which act God passed by the proud lords at Jerusalem and sent His glorious message down from heaven to the poor shepherds in the fields. Yea, the holy angel, following the example of Christ his Lord, became so lowly, and did not deem it an unbecoming task to preach to the poor shepherds the most glorious tidings, which we still possess, and which shall remain among Christians until the end of time.

From this story and example we learn what humble spirits the angels are, who are free from all pride. It would be well if all who think themselves to be wise and saintly people and mighty lords, would learn from this example not to be proud on account of their skill, wisdom, power and other gifts, nor to despise others as their inferiors. Surely, if great gifts and accomplishments ought thus to be regarded, the holy angels would have had reason enough to look down with scorn upon the poor shepherds. But they do not act thus; and though the shepherds are simple and common people, yet the angels do not consider themselves too holy nor too exalted right willingly and gladly to bring them these tidings.

Thus should we also do, applying our talents, in all humility, to comfort and assist others, despising no one. This would be following the example of Christ, as we have seen in the first sermon. He despises no one, but as He came down from heaven, poor and needy into this world, so He is pleased to see poor and miserable persons coming unto Him for help. Hence He is very properly called a Helper, a Savior.

The haughty lords at Jerusalem thought of no such a Savior, they needed Him not; but the humble shepherds felt their need of Him, and hence the angel first proclaims to them, in a brief but glorious sermon, where this treasure can be found, showing us all that depends upon our rejoicing in this Savior who came to liberate us from sin, death, the devil and hell. For the import of the tidings is: “Unto you is born this day a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”

These words are of no human origin; the wisest on earth know them not; but they are angelic words, spoken from heaven for us. Thanks be unto God for these tidings for ever and ever. If we this day read or hear these words, it is the same as though we heard them from the angel himself; the shepherds also did not see the angels, they merely saw the light and its splendor. But they heard the words, and thou likewise canst read and hear them, if thou wouldst but open thine eyes and ears and learn properly to understand this message.

These tidings are far different from those which Moses heard of the angel on Mount Sinai. When these were given the people were much afraid, and their life was endangered by the lightning and thunder which shook the mountains, so that the whole people cried unto Moses: Would that God did not thus preach to us from heaven; but do thou come and preach to us; thee we would gladly hear. But here when the holy angels come from heaven, robed in light, the message has a different import. They begin their tidings as cheerfully as a heart full of agony could desire, proclaiming and singing that we must not be afraid, but rather rejoice with our whole heart, yea, even be proud and bold in our joy, on account of this Child, who is our Savior and is called of the angels by an especial name, “Christ the Lord.”

This name contains the entire Scriptures; for everything written in them points to this Savior, the Christ. The law had no remedy against sin and death; good works and piety could not comfort nor make the heart glad; this

could only be done by Christ. This fact the angels have in view when they proclaim: This is He who shall be a substitute for all, through whom it is possible to obtain forgiveness of sins and to inherit eternal life; for He alone is the true Redeemer and Savior. This truth expels, at once, every doctrine and religion which attempt without Christ to lead men to heaven. If Christ alone is the Savior, then neither His mother Mary, nor St. Peter, nor St. Paul can be such; nor can St. Augustine, Bernard, Francis, Dominic, with all their regulations, avail anything in this respect, although the pope and his priests have thus far directed the people to the intercession of the saints, to monasticism and other vain ceremonies. Does this agree with the tidings of the angels? Does this correspond to the beautiful hymn: "A little Child so glorious," etc.? No, to the glory of our Savior Christ, and to the discomfiture of ourselves, the pope, and all self-righteous saints, we sing: "If this Child had not been born, we would all have been forlorn." If without Christ we are all lost, then will the monk with his observances and the priest with his masses also be lost; no one is excepted. Never, by means of their monkish rules, fastings and prayer, can they be saved; only through Christ is this possible, who alone is the Redeemer or Savior.

As these tidings of the angel contain a new revelation, and do not threaten the wrath of God and everlasting damnation, as the law does, but rather bring comfort and joy and salvation to those who are accursed by the law and fear and tremble, the song of the angels* rings joyously in harmony with the message. Many thousands come from heaven to be present when these tidings are made known, and right willingly they form themselves into a company of singers, beginning a song so charming, that, as the tidings themselves were incomparably beyond all others, so was this song of praise exceedingly beautiful, divine; for never before did the world hear such a song as this: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

This song has a threefold meaning. In the first place, we must not understand it as teaching us what we should do, but as showing that thanks and honor shall now be given to God because this Savior is born. The angels meant to say: Ere this Child was born there was naught in this world but blasphemy and idolatry; for all that is without Christ, no matter how grand and glorious it may be, is but blasphemy. If God is to be God indeed, that is, if people are to honor Him and worship Him as God, it must be done

through this Child. Thus alone it is possible for us to know and to be certain that God is a kind, compassionate, and merciful God, who has even sent His own Son into our flesh and blood on our account. This great, unspeakable benefit prompts and moves the hearts to open themselves unto Him in true love, confidence and hope, praising and thanking Him for such mercy.

Of this result the angels sing, proclaiming that God shall now be honored “in the highest;” not with good works, which cannot rise to heaven, but with the heart, which lifts itself from the earth and in such thanksgiving and holy trust soars aloft to God, our merciful Father.

Where the Child Jesus is not known it is impossible to honor God aright. The entire world, even His chosen people, was full of idolatry before the birth of Christ. One went here, the other there to worship, erecting as many altars as there were beautiful trees in the forests, as the prophets tell us. They were so idolatrous that while they sought God earnestly they did this merely through sacrifices, fastings and penances, wherewith no one was benefited except the devil; he received the honor due unto God. This is the greatest dishonor and blasphemy which God meets in the world and which arises from not knowing Christ. To this, thanks be to God, there shall now be an end, as the angels sing; the people shall now no longer honor the devil or themselves, but God “in the highest.”

Another and even more gross dishonor is that men worship money, possessions, and the like. Verily, of such idolatry the world is full. Just see how kings and princes, tradesmen and farmers, do homage to this rough log and idol, this shameful mammon, this miserable make-shift, as though everything depended on him, while they neglect the true support, the Savior, the Child Jesus, even despising Him and becoming so mad and foolish that they reject and persecute Him. Thus God is blasphemed and dishonored on every side; on the one hand by a subtle idolatry, by self-righteousness and pretended holiness, on the other, by a more gross idolatry, which enthrones mammon in the heart instead of God.

The angels sing: This also shall be changed now that this light, the newborn Child, begins to shine. Henceforward people will look no longer to their own holiness and righteousness; they will care naught for father or mother, for gold or wealth, but will accept this only Savior and give

themselves unto Him with their whole heart; then will God be truly honored and known and praised.

This devotion Adam lost, through sin, in Paradise; and now this accursed custom cleaves to us that we do not honor God nor seek our glory in Him and through Him, but rather in ourselves. Look at the pope and the bishops; money and riches they have plenty, but they will not honor God and spread His Word. How, forsooth, could such big lords, so full of dignity and power, do this? Why, every boor who can play the bagpipe wants to be praised! If this is the feeling in regard to matters which might be called dung and dirt, and for which men desire honor and distinction, of course this will be much more the case with those who busy themselves with more pretentious matters, such as righteousness, holiness, good works and public virtues. With such people the devil is so much master of the situation that he easily prevents their giving thanks to God; they desire the glory for themselves.

The whole human race is poisoned with this accursed vanity, from the time when the devil filled Adam and Eve with the desire to be like God: it adheres to us still. If God gives us skill, money, wealth and authority, yea, if a house-wife, miss or a servant-girl gets a new bonnet or dress, praise and admiration from others is expected.

Since the Child Jesus, the light that illumines the world, has come, the angels can sing that now the honor due unto Him is no longer neglected. All who will receive Him shall say: My righteousness, holiness, wisdom, wealth and authority are all naught, but the Child Jesus is all in all. Thus God receives the honor that belongs to Him; He becomes our strength, defense and joy: our true wealth, in whom we trust with all confidence, comfort and gladness, so that we can say to mammon, whom the whole world serves and worships as a God: Thou affordest me comfort only in this that when I have thee I can eat of thee and furnish the necessary raiment with thee, and that I can by thee feed and clothe others who are poor; otherwise I have no use for thee. To art and science I will say: God has given me understanding and wisdom; these I will employ to His honor and to the welfare of my fellow-men; more they cannot do. My consolation, hope and joy I find neither in money nor in talents, but only in Christ Jesus the Lord, the Son of God.

Properly to honor God, and to acknowledge His majesty, we should say: Lord God, whatever we have is Thine; we did not create it, Thou gavest it unto us; but the chief gift of Thy mercy is our deliverance from sin and the devil, for which ail honor and praise is due unto Thee. It pleases God when we wind such garlands of praise for Him, when we give unto Him all glory, claiming no honor for ourselves, but giving thanks unto Him for the greatest, as well as for the least of His blessings.

This lesson, then, is the first which is taught us in the song of the angels, in which they embrace everything we possess, but especially the spiritual gifts and true devotion, righteousness, holiness, wisdom and good works. We are taught to confine these not to this world, but to lift them heavenward, and give all glory to God; and this can now be done through this little Child, as the angels sing.

The world reverses this lesson, as is very evident: since they do not recognize nor respect this Child, they run and strive only after their own honor. No one is content with his position; the day-laborer wishes to be a merchant, the nobleman a prince, and the king an emperor. Such desires are a clear sign that those who harbor them are without Christ, and know Him not. Such persons pervert the song of the angels and sing: Hail, here on earth, to the yellow gold and shining silver, to my authority, influence and skill! Sing on, poor fellows, sing lustily; but be assured that yours is a donkey's song, beginning high up in the scale, but ending miserably flat. Such a song honors man and mammon, yea, the arrant devil in hell, but not "God in the highest."

The second lesson of the song of the angels is contained in the words: "Peace upon earth." This lesson has a meaning similar to the first. It contains a wish and prophecy that, henceforward, prosperity and happiness on earth shall be with those who know and have accepted this Child. What is the world without Christ? What else but a perfect hell and kingdom of Satan, full of ignorance and contempt of God, yea, full of lies, cheating, avarice, gluttony, drunkenness, whoredom, strife and murder, etc. Thus the world acts; there is neither love nor confidence among men; one fears the other. Those who would escape deception and fraud, must understand "white" to mean "black." Even friends cannot be trusted and must sometimes be feared more than enemies. Thus the devil rules and guides the

world, so that everything goes wrong, and no virtue, and no peace, can be found on earth.

As the angels sang that they who know and accept this Child shall give praise to God for all things, so they also sing, and promise and comfort with these words, that such tyranny of the devil will now have an end, that the Christians shall be peaceable with each other, and lead a quiet life, willingly assisting and advising each other, avoiding all contention and discord, dwelling with each other in gentleness, having a peaceable government and a forbearing spirit, each one striving to excel the other in doing good, – and all this because this Child is born.

Such a result will follow, say the angels, if God is once honored, and acknowledged as the Lord from whom we have all things. Then will the people be friendly toward each other; no one will hate, nor envy, nor despise the other, but each will rather consider the other better than himself, saying: Dear Brother, do thou pray to God in my behalf. Then there shall be peace and happiness in abundance, for peace, in the Hebrew language means everything good. Such a peaceable life ought to be among Christians, each one endeavoring to please the other and avoiding what might give offence. Those who do otherwise, do not heed the song of the angels, but listen to the howlings of the wolf, the devil, who sings them this song: Continue to steal, to commit adultery, to murder, etc. This is the devil's song which comes from hell.

Among Christians it must not be thus; they should do as the angels sing, who tell us so beautifully of the spirit of true devotion. First, that we should leave all glory in heaven, and praise and honor God alone. Secondly, that we should live in a brotherly spirit with each other on earth, and not listen to the wicked insinuations nor follow the tyrannical ways of the devil. Thus the angels teach us and all the world. But they already see that the greater portion of mankind will not thus acknowledge the Child Jesus, and that much confusion on this account will arise; wherefore they add the third lesson in these words: “Good will toward men.” That is: We (the angels) fondly desire that the world would do as taught in the other lessons; that men would honor God “in the highest,” and have peace among themselves; but we know that many will be found who will not receive the gospel nor accept the Son, rather persecuting both. May God, then, grant to the believers a joyful and glad heart to exclaim: I have a Savior, heaven is

mine, the Son of God is mine; therefore, although I am scorned and persecuted, and though I suffer all manner of evil on account of this my confession and faith, yet I will not become impatient nor angry, but will be content, and no sorrow, nor trouble, nor persecution, however great, shall deprive me of the pleasure and consolation which I have in this new-born Child. Such a disposition the angels wish to all believers, so that they can be glad in adversity and sing, when %he devil rages; so that they may have peace and assurance in Christ to withstand all misfortune and even to mock the devil when he would injure them, hurling into his face the words: Foolish devil, if thou canst injure me only as to my body, life, possessions, etc., thou mightest just as well leave me, for thou canst really do me no harm; I have a heavenly Savior who will abundantly console me in eternity for any temporal loss which I may suffer.

This third lesson teaches us how we should have a joyful and bold spirit to meet all adversity, so that we can say to the devil: Thou shalt not succeed in thy evil attempt to rob me of my pleasure in this Child. Such a heart is happy, glad, joyful and courageous even in adversity; for its blessings are of God through faith in Christ. It says to the devil and the world: On your account I shall not give up my joy, nor do I care for your anger; do as you please: Christ gives me more happiness than you can cause me sorrow. Such a heart the angels desire us to have, and of such an one they sing.

The world does not repeat this song of the angels, but tries to sing it after the tune of its god, the devil, thus: Glory to the devil in hell, strife upon earth, and ill-will toward men. Satan causes his bride, which is the world, to sing thus, to blaspheme God, and to persecute His Word; after which follows contention, divisions, war, murder, etc. to such an extent, that on account of fear and trembling no one can have a happy moment nor enjoy his bite of bread. In this the devil is mightily assisted by the sects; they are his mouthpiece, slandering and blaspheming God in heaven through their false doctrine.

The devil, with his song, resembling that of an owl, continues to arouse disturbances, setting princes and lords against each other, causing strife and deceitfulness, so that men become treacherous toward each other, doing the will of the devil and causing difficulties everywhere, so that people stand with trembling hearts and full of fear. Hence it happens that so many can be found who, in spite of all the bounteous blessings, which God has bestowed

upon them, do not enjoy a single moment of their life. Although cellar and buttry are full, such persons will be sad and cheerless, finding no real pleasure in anything which they possess. Thus the devil's pleasure is fulfilled, who at all times envies man every enjoyment which comes from God and His gifts. The angels, on the other hand, sing us a different song; they wish us a steadfast heart, which shall be bold and resolute amid the various trials and calamities of life.

This, then, beloved hearers, is the song of the holy angels, which no other teachings nor books contain. By it we are instructed as to the true service of God; how we should realize in this Child the mercy of God, and be prompted thereby to give ready thanks to Him who sent unto Us and for us His Son, our Lord and Savior; also, how we should live peaceably with each other; and finally how we should in patience overcome all misfortune, and rejoice always through Christ in this little Child. The angels, indeed, composed their joyous, jubilant song with but few words, yet every one must readily perceive that it was not framed on earth, but that its home, from which it came, is heaven. May God, our Father, assist us through His Holy Spirit to retain this song, and to order our lives according to it; this we pray through Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord. Amen.

Fifth Sermon For Christmas. On The Gospel-Lesson – Luke 2:15-20. Example Of The Virgin Mary And Of The Shepherds.

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. – Luke 2:15-20

The preceding meditations on the Christmas tidings have taught us how God sent His angels, the princes of heaven, to the humble shepherds, who were poor and lowly people, to sing to them a cheerful song of the Child Jesus. After this song was ended the Christmas-Gospel continues thus: “And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord has made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart”

From this we learn that the preaching and singing of the angels was not in vain. For though the shepherds watched over their flocks with much care and devotion, yet they do not hesitate to leave them now, and to hasten to see the Child which the angels called Lord. Such was the effect of the angel's preaching.

Another effect was this: the shepherds themselves become preachers of the glad tidings; they make known to every one what they had heard concerning this Child, so that, as the Evangelist tells us: "All they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds." All wondered, yet we may suppose that with most of them this astonishment was but of short duration. Experience teaches us that the greater portion of mankind consist of people so wicked and corrupt that they immediately forget the visitations of God when they are past, no matter whether they brought gifts of mercy and grace, or inflicted severe trials and punishments. The human heart is full of heedlessness and culpable forgetfulness. Hence it is that God must ever send new miracles and punishments, else we would entirely forget Him and His mercies. No doubt the same was true with the people, of whom the Evangelist relates that all who heard these sayings wondered. No doubt there was, for some time, much excitement on account of this report of the Child at Bethlehem, at whose birth the angels came from heaven to preach and to sing of His glory, and to adore whom there came wise men from the distant East. Ere two, three, or four years had passed, this occurrence was forgotten at Bethlehem, and no one, or, at the most, but very few, remembered or believed this story; yea, when thirty years afterwards the Lord began to preach and perform miracles, no one thought of His wonderful birth.

Such recklessness we find among ourselves even at the present day. Scarcely can you find one among a hundred, yea, among a thousand, who is yet mindful of the misery and wickedness which, both as to doctrine and life or the worship of God, prevailed under the pope, so that poor souls were burdened on every side, and no sufficient comfort could be found. All distress, labor, and expense, all oppression of the conscience are now forgotten; if it were not thus, we would surely much more, love the precious Gospel which has freed us from such thralldom, and would manifest greater care and gratitude for it.

The Jews acted in the same spirit. While yet in Egypt there was no end to their complaining and lamentation. But how was it afterwards? Scarcely were they three days in the desert, when they expressed their desire to be back again in the land of their bondage. Such an unstable thing is the human heart that it soon tires of almost every thing, easily forgetting former great pains and sufferings, and much less bearing in mind the benefactions which it received, as the proverb truly says: *Nihil citius senescit quam gratia*. (Nothing becomes an old matter for us sooner than kindness.) If God manifests His displeasure and punishes with pestilence and divers diseases, one plague following another, it is no more heeded than so many characters written in the water or in the air: as long as the punishment is upon us it pains, but as soon as it is past it is entirely forgotten.

The Evangelist tells us in our text that “the people wondered at these sayings;” but surely it was only a temporary emotion. Yet there were a few pious and attentive hearers who were not forgetful nor indifferent, as were the many; for the Evangelist says, “But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.”

It behooves us to study these words, and to learn from them how we ought to hear the Word of God. “Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart;” that is, she meditated upon them. He who firmly retains the Word of God, and studies it, will discover in it, from day to day, new sources of wisdom and consolation, thereby becoming more firmly rooted in his faith; while the superficial and indifferent hearer will not be benefited at all, no matter how often you may preach to him. It is with him as when a blow is struck upon the water.

Mary gives us a better example. She is moved by the tidings; she retains them, inscribes them upon her heart, ponders them, speaks to herself about them and says: These indeed are wonderful tidings that I should be the mother of this Child, of whom the angels sing that He is the Savior of the world, and whom they call Christ the Lord. With such thoughts she enshrines “these things” in the depth of her heart, nor could she forget them. Yea, if the whole world had contradicted her, she nevertheless would stoutly have adhered to her faith that her Child is the Son of God, the Savior of the whole world.

We ought to follow this example of the holy mother of Jesus, since for this very purpose it is presented to us, and keep the Word of God in our hearts with much zeal and earnestness, that it may be ours, as we read in the Song of Solomon 8:6: “Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm.” Here God requires that His Word should not merely be upon our tongues, as foam upon the water, or as saliva in the mouth, which is ejected, but that it should be imprinted in our hearts, and remain there as an inscription which cannot be erased, as a plant which cannot be rooted up. The Virgin Mary had such an heart; she kept these things as though they were a part of herself. Those who have thus embraced the Word, have the true stamp of Christ upon them; the truth is sealed in them, nor will they permit evil spirits, nor the devil himself, to rob them of it; as they have heard it they retain it, and believe in it. Others, though they hear the Word and are astonished at it, will nevertheless soon lose and forget it again.

Here we must first mark well this lesson: If the Word of God is to be firmly rooted in our hearts, we must meditate upon it with much care. We all know how difficult it is to teach a lesson to young children, so that they will comprehend it; it must be repeated to them, with much patience, again and again. Why then should we suppose that the teachings of God’s Word, which are of infinitely greater importance, could be comprehended without all exertion on our part? If we thought so we would be sadly mistaken. Most persons, indeed, when they have heard a sermon, go and attend to something else, thinking but little of what they have heard and learned from the Word of God. But it is all wrong to make that of chief importance which is but secondary. First of all we must seek the kingdom of God; to it our attention must chiefly be directed. But we treat this as subordinate, and think first and chiefly of our every day business, of what we shall eat and drink, of that which pertains to the body and its pleasures. Were it otherwise, we would at least busy ourselves as much with God’s Word as we do with our temporal wants; but this is not the case. We need not wonder, therefore, if, as we see in times of tribulation, this Word is so soon forgotten. With the Christian it ought not to be thus; his chief treasure is the Word of God; it fills his heart. And though he must live and labor in this world, yet his heart will incline chiefly towards this Word, because he loves it most.

So much in regard to the example of the Virgin Mary, which the Evangelist, as was necessary, has presented so vividly. After this we are told: “And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.”

After the shepherds had seen the Child Jesus, and had spread the report concerning Him, they return to their flocks, praising and glorifying God, as they had heard and were taught of the angels, who sang: “Glory to God in the highest,” etc.

In this conduct of the shepherds we find a valuable and beautiful lesson. After they have obtained the revelation from heaven, and the true knowledge of Christ, they do not run out into the desert, as the foolish monks and nuns run into cloisters, but remain in their calling, and are useful to their fellow men. True faith compels no one to forsake his calling and to enter upon an extraordinary mode of life, as the silly monks do, who suppose it impossible to be saved unless they are entirely different from other people. If they were to clothe themselves, to eat and drink, to wake and sleep, like other people, it would be too common, causing no especial notice; but they make a great boast of their adherence to their order and the observance of its rules, and even venture to call it a state of perfection and an angelic order; that is, as St. Paul mentions Col. 2, it is a devilish holiness, for the devil also is an angel and a spirit.

Christ did not come to change or to annul the regulations and duties in regard to outward things; therefore it is right to satisfy the wants of the body, to provide clothing, food, drink, and to labor for it, as it may be necessary. This is God’s own institution and order, now as much in force as ever. Christ did not come to change this. It is for us to determine what we shall eat and what we shall wear, according to the condition in which we are; Christ gave us no laws in this regard; wherefore it is nonsense to attribute to certain changes in these externals any excellence of piety or of spirituality.

The true change which was to be the result of the coming of Christ is this, that man should become better, changed in his heart. Before I found the blessed Gospel I thought God had forsaken me, and that it depended upon my own exertions to be saved. I knew no better than that my good works must accomplish all, that through them I would become free from sin

and death. To carry out this notion I became a monk and underwent many privations. But neither cowl nor gown, neither eating of meat, nor fasting, nor any thing of this kind, will avail aught. By such means sin is not overcome, nor death conquered: but both sin and death are at home beneath a black or gray garment, just as much as beneath a coat of gayer colors. The heart must be changed; that is necessary; it must receive a new light, a new seal, which is faith in Christ, wrought by the Holy Ghost, so that the sinner can say: I know that God has not forsaken me, but that He is merciful, for He sent His Son into the world that I through Him might overcome death and obtain everlasting life.

Such a change as this is proper and necessary. Of this my heart knew nothing before, nor did it have faith; now, however, it has gained this knowledge and belief, and has become entirely changed. Our Lord and Savior Christ is He who accomplishes this, so that the heart and the soul obtain a new understanding, will, desire and love. If before, money and honors were sought by man, he will now, after having obtained a knowledge of Christ, regard Him as far more precious than all money and wealth, and would sooner lay down his life than to deny Christ and His Word. Before this the heart was unwilling to lose even one cent for the sake of true faith, but now it would not suffer itself to be deprived of Christ, no, not for a thousand worlds. In former days many reasoned thus: If I wish to make sure of my salvation I must assume the habit of a monk or nun. How is it now? If one should undertake to robe thee in these monkish garments thou wouldst not comply, but rather escape to the end of the earth. Again, if thou wouldst have been asked to eat meat on Friday, thou wouldst have stubbornly refused, lest the earth would swallow thee up; now, however, thou sayest to the pope, to the bishops, yea, to the devil himself: Hush with your nonsense; why should I not eat meat, or fear that I would sin in doing so? God has not forbidden it; He gave it to man for the very purpose that it should be appropriately used. Thus a change within, a conversion of the heart, takes place when man acquires a new understanding and determination from God's Word, yet remaining what he was before as regards his temporal calling and relations, as the example of the shepherds teaches us.

The shepherds would, of themselves, never have thought that Christ the Savior was born; but when they hear it of the angels they hasten into the

city and seek the Child. When they had found Him, and had spread the tidings concerning this Child, praising God for such mercy and revelation, they return to their flocks, wearing the same garments and carrying the same staff as before; they remain shepherds, and make no change in their calling. Thus Christians teach and live. Christ did not come to change the work of creation, which will be done at the end of time. Then, when the soul is made perfect, of which the Gospel lesson teaches but the beginning, the body will also be renewed, so that we shall no longer need warm rooms, clothing and the like, but will be like the angels, soaring through the air, bright as the beautiful stars. Then every thing which is created will be changed; but until that day comes these external matters must remain as God has arranged them, and no change is to be made. Hence each one ought to regulate his mode of life according to his condition and calling; living in all propriety, modesty, honesty and piety, well knowing that the performance of such external duties cannot injure the Christian faith. In the sight of God it matters not whether thou art a man or a woman, an emperor or a servant, a mayor or a watchman; but this He asks of us, that we be obedient to Him, even unto death, no matter what our calling or position in life may be.

The shepherds praised and glorified God and were satisfied. They do not say: Henceforth we must serve God by dwelling in the desert, where we can devote all our time to meditation and devotion, free from the cares of everyday life. No, this would not be serving God, but would be an escape from duty, glorifying flesh and blood. If thou remainest in the position which God has assigned thee, thou canst serve God, the man as a man, the woman as a woman, the ruler as a ruler, the citizen as a citizen; each one fulfilling his duty in the fear of God, thus glorifying Him. If thou art faithful in thy calling, giving thanks unto Christ, then wilt thou serve God aright, without wearing the habit of a monk and without fastings.

Already in the time of the prophets God was much displeased with the people who thought themselves pious on account of their external works and worship, while the heart remained unconverted. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord, Isaiah 1. and Psalm 50. Go your ways and eat your meat yourself, and have no blessing with it. If I need your victims I know where to find them, sooner than you can bring them for a sacrifice. Who has required this at your hand? But this I demand

of you, that you shall obey my Word and give thanks unto me. Oxen, cows and sheep, I gave unto you to be eaten; now you bring them unto me, in a spirit of flattery, as if I begged them at your hands. The prophet insists, upon all occasions, that the heart should be changed, and that the people thus converted should give thanks unto God in the true spirit of obedience towards Him. With this God will be pleased, no matter what else we may be. Thus the shepherds, with joyfulness and alacrity, and full of gratitude to God, perform their labors as it became their calling and as they had done before.

We read the following story in the *vitis patrum*, which is applicable here: A certain man thought himself to be a great saint, and when he was very desirous of knowing what his place would be in heaven, thinking that it would be an exalted one, he was directed to sit down by the side of a piper as his equal. Astonished at this he asked the latter: My dear sir, is it possible that you did anything good? The piper answered: My business is to play for the peasants at their dances. On one occasion, however, I happened to be present when my companions were about to ravish a maiden; this I prevented, and rescued her from her despoilers. Some time afterwards he asked again what should be his rank. He was directed to ask two women, mothers of families, as to their works. As he had asked the piper, so he asked these women. They answered him: We know of no especial good works performed by us: we carefully attend to our duties at home, and seek to live peaceably with each other, so that we never had any quarrel. After having heard this answer, the old hermit turned away saying to himself: I have now learned that no position in life ought to be despised, be it ever so lowly. It is possible to serve God, and to be pious, under all circumstances, if the heart but loves justice and fears God, who will despise no one.

This story about the hermit, the piper and the two women, is, as I suppose, fictitious, but evidently composed for the purpose of warning people against all monkish customs. To be a true Christian does not depend upon thy outward condition in the world, but it depends upon that organ of life found under the left breast, upon the heart. Thou must know and believe that Jesus is the true Savior; in Him thou must find consolation, and for this give heart-felt thanks to God. Then God will look favorably upon thee, whatever thy position in life may be. We must, therefore, be careful not to separate faith and life from the Word of God, and subject them, as did the

pope, to outward ceremonies, to food, raiment, and particular localities, which is surely wrong, since thereby the Christian faith is renounced. Through faith alone God will justify the sinner and through no other means, no matter what their names may be. Yet it behooves each one so to live that also his outward life may correspond to the requirements of God in this respect/ Thus it will continue to be until this life is ended, when a glorious change will ensue, even the body becoming beautiful, yea, brighter than the sun. May Christ our Savior bring us to this happy consummation. Amen.

Sunday After Christmas. Luke 2:33-40.

And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary His mother, Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also;) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser; she was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks unto the Lord, and spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And when they had performed all things according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the Child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. – Luke 2:33-40

In this Gospel-lesson the principal subject is the prophecy of Simeon concerning Christ and His kingdom. He predicts that much opposition will be raised against Christ and much offense caused by the preaching of His Gospel, first among His own people, the Jews, then also among the Gentiles, as we have heard in the sermon for the third Sunday in Advent. But He is also “set for the rising again of many.” This is the chief point in our text; but several others contained in it we shall briefly notice. The event narrated took place six weeks after the birth of the Child Jesus, when, according to the custom of the Law, He was brought into the temple to be presented unto the Lord with an appropriate sacrifice, Leviticus 3:12. Luke 2. On this occasion the aged Simeon, being also in the temple by the

promptings of the Holy Ghost, took the Child Jesus upon his arms, and prophesied concerning Him, calling Him the Savior and the light of the world, which would shine, not merely within the narrow confines of Judea, but over all the heathen lands.

We are told that “Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him” by Simeon. We need not wonder that Joseph is here mentioned as if he were this Child’s father. The Evangelist speaks thus of Joseph, according to the general custom, because he was honorably wedded to Mary, the mother of the Child. We repeatedly find in the Scriptures that not only natural parents are called father and mother, but also those who act instead of parents. Besides this, to avoid all misunderstanding in this regard, the Evangelist has told us above, clearly and distinctly, that this Child was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. Let us mark this well, so that we may not be offended when St. Luke in this place and the Scriptures in other passages speak of matters as the people are accustomed to speak of them. Here we stand in the presence of a divine mystery. Mary the Virgin, having no connection with a man, becomes the mother of this Child only through the Holy Ghost. Joseph himself knew and believed this, for thus was it revealed to him by an angel in a dream.

When Simeon, the aged sire, took the Child upon his arms, and spoke so eloquently, many of those who heard him, no doubt, judged his words to be but the utterings of an old, childish, insane man. Yet his words were so full of wisdom and instruction that, as the Evangelist relates, “Joseph and His mother marveled” at them; for even the angels had not told them so plainly, as Simeon now does, that the Child would be a light to lighten the Gentiles.

When we are told that “Joseph and His mother marveled,” we must not understand this as if they in the least doubted these sayings, but rather as a proof of their great faith and intelligent comprehension of what was told them. It is a peculiar characteristic of faith that the more it confides in God’s Word, and the more it recognizes His works, so much the more is it astonished and moved to praise and thanksgiving. Where there is no faith, indifference prevails as to what is seen or heard, and there is neither joy nor pleasure there. During these festive days we have heard of the birth of Christ, how He as a little child came into our flesh and blood, to be our Savior from death, sin and hell. Surely, whoever has heard these tidings with a believing heart, and meditates upon this divine deed, must be filled

with wonder. St. Luke describes the faith of Joseph and Mary when he speaks of their amazement at what they hear of the Child, how He should be a light unto the Gentiles, yea, such a light that all else in this world, no matter how brilliant it may seem, is but gloomy night compared with it. He and no one else, neither kings nor princes, can rescue from sin and death.

Such admiration of the glorious Gospel should be in us, that we can joyfully and proudly boast: I am a Christian, I am baptized, and doubt not that I, through Christ, shall conquer sin and death, yea, that even heaven and earth are mine. If a king should present me with a cloak of the finest velvet, or with an entire city, I would be glad. But what would all this be compared with what I have in Christ! A whole empire of this world is naught compared with my heritage in Jesus, with whom I am to be and live through all eternity. Alas, where are they to be found who truly believe this, and retain it in their hearts? True, we all know this story and can repeat it; but that we do not sincerely believe it can easily be shown, for we do not “marvel” at it. Mere knowledge of these events can not be called faith, unless a faith that is cold and dead be meant. True faith causes joy and happy admiration of the works of God. A Christian is an independent, happy person; he cares naught for the devil nor misfortune, since he is convinced that, through Christ, he can overcome them all.

I venture to say that the Virgin Mary, while thus marveling, was filled with a great and holy pride and assurance, relying not upon what she had done, but upon the mercy and grace of God, and upon this Child Jesus. “She marveled,” not because she had been chosen to be the mother of this Child, but “at those things which were spoken of Him.” The true Christian will never be proud of what he is, but of what was given him; he praises not himself, but Him who, through His infinite goodness and mercy, gave him every thing that He has.

God bestows upon us abundant blessings, but we do not realize them; hence it is that we do not “marvel” nor rejoice at the unspeakable mercy and blessing bestowed in this Child. That we poor sinners are assured of eternal life and justified in Christ, ought surely to enkindle within us at least a spark of courage to bear up against adversity and persecution, and to bid defiance to the devil and the world, telling them: Take my life if you will: it matters not as long as I have this Child. Take the shell and the hull, yet I will lose nothing; for the treasure, the kernel, is still mine; namely, the fact

that through Christ I have been saved from sin and everlasting death, and have escaped the wrath of God. In this wise, we ought to express our astonishment. But who does it? Few indeed are they who marvel at the things spoken of Christ; yet in these very sayings there is food unto eternal life, and a never ending satisfaction which even angels desire, as St. Peter writes.

Let us now consider the prediction of Simeon. It refers, chiefly, to the Jews; for thus he says: "Behold this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." This foretells the fate of the Child, as to His reception in the world; many shall oppose Him and thereby fall; many again shall accept Him and thereby have a sure footing. He who wishes to be a Christian can now choose for himself; no one is forced in this respect. To employ force belongs, according to the order which God has established, to the governments of this world, to princes, governors, police-officers, and others who have executive authority; their duty is to compel men to obey the laws, and to punish those who will not desist from theft, murder, cheating, and the like. But in the kingdom of Christ another rule prevails; if thou wilt not believe thou art not forced to do so; but the time will come when a mighty one will conquer thee, against whom resistance is in vain.

Very well, the wicked answer, we need then have no anxiety now, since we have yet time enough. Suppose this to be the case, what then? The fact still remains: If thou wilt be saved thou must accept this King who, as Simeon says, is not pleasing to the world. Some there are, however, though their number is small, who are not offended at this King, and whom He raises from their fallen estate.

The fact that Christ "is set for the fall" of the greater portion of mankind, should not disconcert us; we cannot make it otherwise. It will always be thus in the world, that wherever this King is with His Word and authority, there many will be offended at Him and fall. With this state of affairs thou must be content, if thou wouldst remain a Christian. Seek, however, to find and to belong to the little flock of those who faithfully accept this King, and unto whom He "is set" not for a "fall," but for a "rising."

The Papists malign our doctrine shamefully, and oppose it with all their might, not because they doubt it; for the greater part of them know it to be true; but because they are impelled by malice and obstinacy, that they may

maintain their authority and glory. They are naught for Christ and His Word; the belly is their god. Hence we do not count them among those who are offended at Christ and fall. They, however, who are not open enemies and persecutors of the pure doctrine, who even hear it and confess that this Child is the Savior of the world, but who do not admit that through our own good works we cannot obtain remission of sins nor justification before God, are the persons to whom Christ is “set for a fall.” We cannot believe, they say, that those who for centuries have adhered to the customary faith and practice, should all be damned.

Wherever thou seest such opposition, thou mayest rest assured that there the Child, born of the Virgin Mary, “is set for a fall,” not for those who know not God, but for “many in Israel,” that is, for those who have the Word of God, etc. Unto these this little Child becomes a stumbling-block, over which the self-made saints and the wise of this world fall and break their necks. This, however, ought not to disturb us in our faith; it is but the necessary result of the obstinate refusal to accept the Child Jesus.

The Jews are an example of this. They were exceedingly wroth at the words of Christ, John 8: “You shall die in your sins.” They thought: What meaneth this idiot? Have we not the prophets and Moses? Do we not know what is right and what God demands of us? Shall all this avail us nothing? Shall we be instructed as to our salvation by this apprentice of a carpenter? They went their way, struck their heads against Christ and fell.

Not otherwise act the priests of the pope at the present day. I mean the best of them, for the greater portion are but gluttons! They denounce our doctrine as devilish and heretical, saying: We pray, we fast much, we torture ourselves; shall all this be in vain? Will God not be pleased with it? Come on then, let us eat and drink and commit fornication, we still can enter heaven, since Christ did not come to save the just, but sinners, as these Lutherans preach! You observe that these fellows are offended at the Child Jesus; they fall, no more to arise.

Be not disturbed at this; remember thy calling as a Christian, and know well that thy Lord, thou thyself, thy doctrine and thy life, all will cause dissatisfaction among men. We have heard how Christ became a stumbling-block even unto the people of God, so that many who are great and wise and holy in their own estimation, dash themselves against Him and fall. It

cannot be otherwise than that all such will consider as fools and as heretics those who accept, with implicit faith, Christ as their king. Thus the true Christians, together with their Lord and Savior Christ, become an object of offense and are “set for the fall of many.” This is a portion of the prophecy of Simeon.

The Gospel tells us further that this Child is set not merely for the fall, but also “for the rising of many in Israel.” This we must not forget. They who accept this King, know that without Him they are weak and unable to stand; hence they would rather die than lose Him, their only support. They realize that He alone, whom the angels call a Savior, and of whom Simeon says that He is a “rising unto many,” can help them in their great distress. They confess that they are wretched sinners, who have deeply fallen; they stretch forth their arms and with joy cling firmly to this precious rock, raising themselves again through faith in Him; nor shall they ever be confounded, 1 Pet. 2. But those who deem themselves beyond all danger are fools; they desire no help or mercy, but dash themselves headlong against this rock with curses and with maledictions. Again I say, be not disturbed by this; remember how Simeon thus prophesied concerning this Child; look rather to the few unto whom He has become a “rising;” to those poor sinners who, as such, are afraid of the wrath and judgment of God, but who through this Child become holy and just. He makes the ignorant wise, and restores those who have gone astray; yea, He helps the miserable and degraded, and saves all who acknowledge their transgressions. Be comforted then through this Child, and let nothing separate you from Him.

For years I meditated, with much earnestness, upon this subject, whether it would not be possible to preach Christ without giving offense to any one; but now I am convinced that it cannot be done. Hence we learn what answer should be given to those who charge us with having brought disturbance and all sorts of misfortune, into the church of the pope, hitherto so peaceable and quiet. I tell all these wiseacres who bring such accusations that they ought to look carefully into our Gospel lesson and hear the prediction of Simeon, who declares that wherever the pure doctrine is preached, there many will be offended at the truth and fall beneath it. But not all will fall; some will fondly cling to the truth, and thus will Christ be set “for the rising of many;” that is, of those who know that they are guilty

sinners, whose conscience condemns them, all who now find joy and comfort in the pure doctrine of the Gospel.

Our opponents do not consider this, but look merely at the offense given and the “fall” caused by our preaching, which, however, can not be avoided. The doctrine, which is pure and good, is not to be blamed for this, but the people who will not accept nor obey it are to blame. Consider this matter attentively and tell me frankly: Would it not have been better, during the time of popery, if there had been more commotion, more opposition, as there is at present, instead of that lifeless quiet, which the devil improved so well to spread idolatry and false doctrine, driving souls to hell in crowds? Who would not rather suffer a temporal loss than one which is eternal? The want of the pure doctrine, of the knowledge of God and of true devotion, so manifest among the Papists, was indeed an unspeakable, everlasting injury.

Many a Diet has been held in the past years for the purpose of devising some plan by which the Gospel could be preached to the satisfaction of all. This, surely, can never be done. Take away whatever may cause offense from your preaching and you will lose Christ Himself. The prophecy of Simeon is true, “He is set for the fall of many in Israel,” of many among those who claim to be the church, the people of God.

Christ came to us again through His blessed Gospel ere we were aware of it, even as He formerly came to the Jews. We ought to have rejoiced at this with all our hearts, praising God for His great mercy. But what happened? The pope and the bishops became wroth; they act as though their permission should have been obtained before the preaching of the pure doctrine and the purification of the church was undertaken. Here, then, Christ is at once “set for the fall of many.” He will not desist from the spreading of His Gospel; the pope and the bishops will not accept it; the conflict immediately begins, and Simeon’s prediction is being fulfilled: “This child is set for the fall of many.”

Offenses must come, as Christ says Matt. 11; and St. Paul says, 1 Cor. 11: “For there must be also heresies among you.” The Gospel must be persecuted; but Christ will remain in all His glory and will become “a rising unto many.” They, indeed, who desire to change the Word and the effect of Christ’s coming, will surely be dashed to pieces; to such He becomes a rock of destruction and not of support. Yet it is not the fault of the rock that

people, foolishly and blindly, dash their heads against Him. God has placed Him there for a different purpose, for a support and “a rising” of all who believe in Him, who firmly cling to Him and earnestly desire to be saved through Him. Thus Isaiah already speaks of Him in the 28. chapter.

The Gospel of itself does not cause strife and dispute in the world, as the pope and bishops charge against it, forgetting the fact that they, by their sins and idolatry, have caused various punishments and misfortunes. If the pure doctrine were permitted to have free scope, contentions and other troubles would not occur. No wonder that God does not deal with the pope and his priests as they desire.

The Jews were also much offended at Christ without any cause. He desired them to be happy, yea, to believe in Him and be saved. That they would not do so was their fault, not His. They ought to have received Him as their Lord, who was promised to them and had now appeared; but instead of this, they were offended at His lowly appearance and spurned Him. Let us beware, lest in this time of offenses we also be led away from the pure Gospel. He, however, who is offended and falls, must not blame the Gospel, but his own stubborn head and his unbelieving heart. This is the first lesson to be learned from the prophecy of Simeon.

Simeon continues his prediction and tells Mary: “Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” This sounds harsh and unfriendly, and seemingly contradicts the statement made above, that Simeon blessed Mary. But let us not forget that this was written as a precept not only for that time, but also for our instruction. Surely, neither you nor I, nor even an apostle, would ever have supposed that so much wickedness as the Gospel has brought to light, could be found on earth. Formerly there were many excellent and pious people among the Papists, who lived an honest and decorous life. There were many wise and intelligent persons, of whom one could be assured that their intentions were perfectly upright. As long as the Gospel was not in vogue the world glittered brilliantly with her science, art, propriety and honesty. Brighter still was her appearance in the garb of spirituality which she subsequently assumed. She instituted various clerical orders, and arranged forms for public worship so imposing, as is seen among the Papists, that whoever saw it might easily be led to pronounce her holy and spotless. With this semblance of external and spiritual virtues, human reason was so

captivated that if the Gospel had not come and exposed this deception, hypocrisy and idolatry, the world would surely have become a prey of the devil with all her apparent piety, wisdom, humility and holiness.

With the preaching of the Gospel a change is produced. This Child immediately “is set for the fall and rising of many, and for a sign which shall be spoken against.” It becomes unmistakably evident that those who before were presumed to be model saints are, verily, the greatest sinners; that they who were regarded as wise are, really, the most stupendous fools; and that the gentle hearts, apparently full of mildness, are full of blood-thirstiness. Verily, the Gospel has no greater enemies than these very virtuous, wise and holy people; yea, the greater their self-righteous pride, the more acute and bitter is the enmity against the Gospel. This is an accursed and abominable state of affairs.

Simeon refers to this in his prediction. The world, says he, both in her temporal and in her spiritual relations, struts along with much dignity, performs many virtuous deeds, and shuns no trouble to make the impression that she is peopled with angels and children of God. In this deception she succeeds so well that it is almost impossible to convince men of the wickedness and poison that lurks under this cloak of hypocrisy. No power on earth could tear away this mask; the preaching of Christ, and His Gospel alone can do it. This can pierce the poisonous tumor, and lay open the nauseous corruption. As soon as the preaching of the Gospel resounds through the world, these proud spirits become enraged; then these cunning saints burst the limits of their pretended holiness, so that all can clearly see their deception and knavery.

Many a ruler is gifted with intelligence and skill, desiring his people to be prosperous – is liberal, virtuous, just, attentive to the poor and the oppressed, diligent in the execution of the laws, a faithful husband, in short, just such a person as we would select for a good, a virtuous and pious ruler, especially if judged, according to the standard of excellence in vogue under the pope, by prayers, fastings, devotions, dedications of chapels, altars, churches and the like; all of which calls forth admiration from the people. Preach the pure doctrine to such a virtuous and much-admired king, and even he who seemed a model ruler will show that all his excellence was but a pretense. He becomes indeed a murderer, a tyrant, a man regardless of justice, a persecutor of the Gospel, which he would crush to earth if he

could. Did not Saul, Ahab and other kings, down to the present day, act thus? Who would ever have supposed that so much wickedness was concealed beneath the bright and saintly surface? The Gospel, and it alone, can bring to light such filth, and madness, and poison.

It would be natural to presume that the pope, the cardinals, the bishops and the priests would be the first to embrace the Gospel, as they are regarded as the most pious and most exalted among all the people. But the very reverse is true. The Gospel has no more violent and more frantic adversaries than the pope with his clergy, his schools, his teachers, monks and priests, who ought to be zealous in advancing its interests, since they are officials in the Church. The words of Simeon spoken to Mary are applicable here: This Child, to which thou didst give birth, will cause much noise in the world by bringing to shame those people who were venerated as saints upon earth.

Hereby “the thoughts of many hearts are revealed,” so that many a man who is much revered on account of his wisdom and saintly piety, who appears so holy that he seems qualified to be the guardian of the entrance to heaven, becomes exposed in all his wickedness, idolatry, envy, hatred, ignorance and many other faults, which cannot be enumerated. He will not hear nor endure the Word of God, defends idolatry and destroys people in its behalf; yea, if he could crush the truth of the Gospel by deluging the land with blood, he would do it without remorse. Such a wicked heart, full of the deadliest venom, ought not to be found in the world, least of all in the breast of those who are regarded and eulogized as pious, wise, honest, mild and virtuous. True it is: This Child will bring to light the secrets of the human heart.

I confess, when I began to preach the glorious Gospel I did not think that the world was so wicked as it is. I did expect that all would leap for joy when they should hear of their liberation from the thralldom of the pope, from the woe and anguish of an oppressed conscience, and when they should be assured of the mercy of God in Christ, which freely imparts the blessings for which they had labored long and unceasingly, but in vain. Especially did I expect the bishops and the schools of learning to accept the truth of the Gospel.

Ah, how I was mistaken! For this very truth which we bring we are buffeted, especially by those who are officers in the church. But this treatment shall not disconcert us; this madness of the world shall not impede the spreading of the Gospel; we shall boldly continue to preach it. In the light of the pure doctrine the devil and his fellows are clearly manifest as enemies of God, and the world becomes known, although she may pretend to be very pious and holy. I repeat, I never could have believed that there is so much willful disregard of God's Word in the human heart as I now discover by preaching the Gospel to men who outwardly appear upright and pious. Why, the pope, the bishops, the noblemen, the citizens and peasants are all full of devils, else they would not reject and scorn, and maliciously persecute the glorious Gospel. Such infernal malice I did not see in men before the pure doctrine was brought to light. Then they acted as if filled with the Holy Ghost; but now, through the Gospel, Christ has exposed the secrets of their hearts; it is evident that they are possessed of the devil.

Why is this revelation made? To instruct us and to comfort us. We are taught that we should not be perplexed if we discover the saints to be devils, if we are compelled to exclaim: How is it that this noble prince, this refined citizen, this attentive husband, are all so blind, so malicious and so hostile to the Word of God? Our text gives the true answer: Ere this the thoughts of men were hidden, but now He has come who reveals the secrets of the hearts. He has kindled such a light, through His Word, that all concealment of the thoughts is of no avail; they are exposed in the light of day, and though never seen before, now they are manifest.

It is true, the devil always was a liar and a murderer, just as he is now; but he was so charmingly adorned that he was not recognized, but taken for an angel of light. But now, since the Gospel light shines in his face, his features can be distinguished; we see that he is a liar, a cheat and a murderer, as he has been from the beginning. The same characteristics we discover in his followers, from the noblest lord down to the lowest menial; the higher their position in piety and saintliness seemed to be, so much the greater hypocrites, full of venom and blasphemy, are they. Such they always were; but thus far their true character was not known. God came, and with His Gospel opened the window of their hearts and immediately, as Simeon

says, the thoughts of many became revealed. Concealment was no longer possible.

Again, this revelation contains much comfort for us, when the world opposes and persecutes the Word of God. She does this under the semblance of holiness, and might thereby deceive us; but now we know her and can conclude, without mistake: No matter how holy and sanctimonious she may appear, as long as she cannot bear the truth and persecutes the Word of God, she is the devil's own, and all her virtues and saintly actions are but a miserable sham. Of course, we do not mean to denounce her virtue, intelligence and wisdom; in themselves these are praiseworthy; but the mischief lies in this, that they are made the devil's mask under which to blaspheme God and to persecute His Word.

Chastity is lauded very much, as indeed it is a great and noble virtue; but, pray, what would you think of a modest and chaste virgin who had murdered her parents? Why this, to be sure: Though she may be a virgin, she is nevertheless a great criminal, who merits punishment for her crime in spite of her virginity. Thus we must apply the words of Simeon when he says: Mary, thy Son will bring to light many a crime of people who now walk about as saints; in time they will prove themselves the most decided enemies of God. But our reason will interfere and say: Are they not now honest and pious people; why then call them hypocrites and murderers? Go to, I say, with such honeyed intercession; thank God, ere long it will all be plain. Let Christ and His Gospel be preached and it will immediately be evident that the greater part of the so-called honorable and pious people in the world are the greatest knaves, murderers, and enemies of God. They will not endure the Gospel, but will endeavor, by all kinds of devices and tyranny, to destroy its power and influence.

I know that men consider it wrong to speak thus plainly of their conduct; but how can they hope to excuse themselves before God? Even before men these deceivers cannot always carry out their hypocrisy. If the heart is full of murderous intentions, it requires but little more to become a murderer in deed. Such wickedness is made manifest by the Gospel, else no one would know it or believe it.

Simeon, in his prophecy to Mary, continues: "And a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also." Mary saw and experienced such wickedness

of the world, but not she alone; the entire Christian Church, at all times, had the same trials when the light of the Gospel was bright in her. Such experiences are sad and distressing for the Christian, as St. Peter writes of Lot, 2. Pet 2: "For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds."

This is the sword that pierces the hearts of the Christians; they are sad, because the world is so wicked, so full of malice and tyranny against Christ, so full of scorn and persecution against His Word and His disciples. This pain and sorrow of the Christian exceeds all his other sufferings, and awakens the saddened heart to earnest prayer. When it has come to this point, however, be assured that the punishment for the wicked world will not tarry much longer. So much in relation to the prophecy of Simeon.

Besides this prophecy of Simeon and the lessons contained in it, we have yet, in our Gospel, the story of "Anna the widow," who, also moved by the Holy Ghost, testified and spake of Christ, The Evangelist relates that she "served God with fastings and prayers night and day." Our opponents, the Papists, think that this furnishes them an argument against us, although we have never denied that we should serve God with true prayer and fastings. Whatever has been established of God is right; and inasmuch as fasting, which is temperance in eating and drinking, and also prayer, belong to the requirements of God, we regard them as an obedient fulfillment of His will. But this is not the view of the Papists; they claim that such a compliance with certain rules causes forgiveness of sins, and makes sure of eternal life. This view of fasting and prayer we emphatically oppose, holding with the angel that the Child Jesus is the only Savior, that He alone can save His people from their sins.

In conclusion, let us earnestly pray God for His grace and guidance, that no offense at Christ and the Gospel may cause us to fall, but that the pure doctrine may be our support in life and in death. May Christ our Savior grant us this prayer. Amen.

First Sermon For New Year. The Circumcision. Luke 2:21.

And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the Child, His name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

The Gospel for this festival contains two parts which claim our attention: First, *the Circumcision*, and secondly *the Name of Jesus*, which was mentioned of the angel, as the Evangelist tells us, even before the conception of the Child. Hence this name must be of importance to us.

We will first notice the circumcision of the child and observe its peculiarity, not as to the ceremony itself, but in regard to the person circumcised. There is a vast difference between the circumcision of Christ and that of other Jewish children: for there is no similarity between the persons, as you shall presently hear.

The circumcision of the Jews had its origin in the Scriptures, as we may read in Genesis 17:10, etc. The time of its duration is also plainly foretold, namely, until the coming of Christ. Abraham first began it, for God commanded him to circumcise himself and his entire household. After that all male children had to be circumcised on the eighth day after their birth. God promised to be with those who had the mark of circumcision on their body, and to regard them as His people.

God had a particular purpose when He ordained that not Abraham alone, but all male servants of his house should be circumcised, so that the Jews might not boast that they alone are the people of God. The servants of Abraham who were heathen, were thus counted of God among His people and children, as well as the natural children and heir of Abraham; yea, these Gentile slaves enjoyed the blessings of this ceremony even sooner than

Isaac, though he was the child of promise. Hence the Jews have no reason whatever to boast; if they magnify the importance of circumcision ever so much, they can not deny that God, at the same time, called Gentiles also, who were not children of Abraham, but only purchased servants.

The circumcision has lost its practical value and is to be considered by us merely as to its meaning, and as a figure of faith. It serves us the same purpose as do other events, now past and accomplished, which set before us examples of faith and good works. We are not expected to do the same works, but to have the same obedience and faith which they had who lived at that time. We, accordingly, preach this day about circumcision; not that we should be circumcised, for that is no longer required, but that we may learn therefrom obedience to God, even as Abraham was obedient. If Christ had not come, we would, in order to be the people of God, have to be circumcised at the present day. The command is clear in this respect: “And the uncircumcised man-child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people.” This command is abrogated through Christ. Circumcision was to be observed to the time of His coming, and no longer; to Him it pointed. Christ, however, forbids us to be circumcised, but commands us to be baptized and to believe, if we would be His people and be saved.

From the ceremony of circumcision we learn how God oftentimes arranges His plans in a wonderful and mysterious manner, entirely inexplicable to our human reason. No doubt, the proud Gentiles regarded this ceremony as the most ridiculous and foolish ever heard of, and laughed at the thought that an all-wise God should have imposed such a silly ordinance upon men, even upon grown persons; for Abraham was already ninety-nine years old when he received this command. Hence came those scurrilous and derisive nicknames which the heathens applied to the Jews: *Recutitos*, *Apellas*, and the like. This, however, might have been expected, as you heard in the preceding sermon; for the ways of God are not the ways of man; His doings seek not the applause of the world, but rather become an object of ridicule and mockery. Man, on the other hand, does what he pleases, and would have the favor of God upon it; then he would be satisfied. Such willfulness God opposes, and hence it is that human reason becomes offended, as St. Paul says 1 Cor. 1:21: “For after that in the

wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

Is it not the height of folly for human reason to undertake to solve the mystery, how in the Lord’s Supper we receive with the bread the body of Christ, and with the wine His blood, for the forgiveness of our sins? Reason asks, what can a little wine and a bite of bread avail? Nor can reason, blind as it is by nature, ask differently. But God does not, on that account, change His ordinance. If reason will not believe nor accept the Word of God, why, she can let it alone. The same is true of Baptism. How is it possible that a child when put in the water, or when sprinkled with it according to the word of Christ, should be cleansed from sin and transferred from the dominion of the devil into the kingdom of God? Can you believe this if you put aside the Word, and attempt to explain and comprehend it with your reason? Yes, if sin were a black or red spot on the skin, then you might understand how water could take it away, but since it is deep down in the heart, pervading the very marrow and bones of the body, reason cannot comprehend how water can effect its removal.

When Abraham received the command to perform circumcision, he might have reasoned thus: Surely, this circumcision cannot avail me, an old man, anything unto salvation; or what will it benefit a child? or what change for the better is effected by it? If God had desired the body to be shaped otherwise, why, He would have formed it so, without the necessity of circumcising it. Reason would, undoubtedly, have argued thus: You may be assured, the devil has gained the victory so soon as the question is once asked, Why did God command this or that? Thus it was with Eve in Paradise. She had the direct command not to eat of the forbidden tree, but as soon as she listened to the insinuations of Satan, and began to ask herself, why should God have forbidden this? so soon she became indifferent as to the command, went her way and fell into that terrible disobedience, the awful results of which we all must bear. Hence the institution of circumcision must not seem strange to us nor cause us offense: we must regard it simply as an ordinance of God. When God speaks and orders anything, it behooves man to keep silence, to worship Him, and with an obedient heart to do, without any further questions, what he is commanded. It is not for us to prescribe to God what He shall do; for we are by nature children of wrath, sinners and liars; His plans words, and deeds

are, therefore, too exalted to be understood by us. Yet it is a fact that we are so blind, so utterly foolish, as to imagine that we not only understand the ways of God, but are able even to improve them. In view of this foolishness Jeremiah well remarks: "The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Since this infirmity disables our judgment, we ought to eschew our own wisdom, and when we have spiritual matters and the commands of God before us we should say: They are inexplicable to us; and, on account of our ignorance and foolishness in divine matters, we cannot comprehend them.

Abraham and his servants were not perplexed at the command of God, but straightway fulfilled it, and made circumcision an example of faith. They did not reason thus: Why, this cannot be the meaning of God, that we grown up people should be circumcised; this would be a silly demand; He must have intended something else by His command; what good can the circumcision of the body do? Similar reasoning and contradiction of God's Word is indulged by the defamers of Holy Sacraments. Those men of old put aside such thoughts and resolved to do as they were instructed; they were obedient because God had so commanded them; although the whole subject was strange to them, they did as they had been ordered. And thus it must be: If I would be saved I must follow the will of God, and do as He bids me. The circumcision of Abraham, his servants and his descendants, thus becomes a bright example of true faith, from which we ought to learn to be obedient unto God, and not to permit our own wisdom and reason to seduce us from His Word.

So much in regard to the circumcision of the ancient Jews, which, however, was ordained to continue only as long as the Law, that is, until the coming of Christ; for He fulfilled the Law. This was indicated by the rule of circumcising the children on the eighth day. The Scriptures establish this order that the seventh day shall be the Sabbath, and the day which follows the Sabbath is the eighth day, with which a new week begins. Thus did our Lord and Savior Christ, with this circumcision, begin the fulfillment of the prophecy concerning Him. This had foretold that He would be a Savior and light to the Gentiles, whose dominion would not be confined to the narrow limits of Judea, but that He would rule over all the world with His Gospel, to save all from their sins. With His circumcision the institution was abolished.

As I remarked in the beginning it is very necessary to distinguish carefully between the circumcision of Christ and that of the Jews, or else we cannot have a clear understanding of this occurrence. The ceremony is the same, but in the persons we see the difference. Circumcision, just as the Law, was ordained for those who were sinners and guilty of eternal death. Christ, however, was free from all sin, and Lord over the Law, so that it had no authority over Him; for the Law deals only with sinners, but He is no sinner. According to the Law He was circumcised like other little children who were sinners, but in this the Law trespassed against Him and, therefore, received its due punishment, namely, its termination. Christ could have abolished the Law at once, and forcibly, if He had desired to do so; for He is master over the Law and in no wise subject to it, because He is free from sin. Not with force, however, but in love and humility He annulled the Law by fulfilling it, and that in our behalf and for our consolation.

Our Lord and Savior had no need of this ceremony, just as He, for His own sake, had no need of becoming man or of being crucified. He did all this for our benefit; we stood in need of one who was without sin and who therefore could fulfill the Law for us and appease the wrath of God. He became subject to the Law for the purpose of transferring to us His victory over the Law, so that we might continue to enjoy this triumph, and possess the same power over the Law which He possesses, namely, freedom from its condemnation. Whoever firmly adheres in true faith to Christ, is free from the curse of the Law.

Let us, therefore, mark well this difference; all our welfare depends upon it. Abraham must of necessity undergo circumcision, for he is a sinner and the Law has authority over him. Christ, being without sin, is free from the Law, but voluntarily He subjects Himself to its demands, so that all who would believe in Him might be exempt and free from its curse. Thus it is that this festival of the circumcision of Christ is one full of consolation, justly demanding of us praise and gratitude to God, inasmuch as we who, by reason of our sins, were under the dominion of the Law, are now, through Christ, free from its terrors, and assured of salvation; yea, to rescue us from the grasp of the Law He willingly bore its curse and became subject to it.

We learn from the words of St. Paul how necessary was this our deliverance from the Law; he says 1 Cor. 7:19: "Circumcision is nothing,

and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.” The Jews could not endure this saying, since it boldly declares that no one who is circumcised thereby keeps or fulfills the Law. Hence it follows that they who were circumcised are nevertheless uncircumcised; or, to speak more plainly, no one fulfills the commandments of God by being circumcised; no one is thereby freed from sin. Though the Jews were circumcised, it was still necessary for them to observe that other command of God: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind and with all thy strength.” Now, show me the man who could boast that he has fulfilled, or that he can fulfill this commandment. Again, the Law demands ‘Thou shalt not covet;’ where now is the person who could claim that he has lived in accordance with this demand, or that he can do so? In short, take whatever commandment you please, and you will be compelled to confess that not one of them has been entirely kept by any man. What, now, is the punishment for those who, though circumcised, have not kept the commandments of God? St. Paul points it out when he refers to Deuteronomy, where we read: “Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this Law to do them.” From this it follows that they who rely upon the works of the Law are under the curse, since they cannot fulfill it. If we could keep the Law, all would be well; but since we cannot do this, the result is that it accuses us and delivers us over to the devil.

We are, therefore, in need of a better and nobler declaration than the one which the Law announces; it can only ask and command: “Thou shalt love God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself.” This is demanded of us, even if our neighbor has injured us and we desire to take revenge. No, this command cannot be fulfilled. Human nature rebels against it; anger, discontent, impatience, hatred, envy, pride, etc., will be aroused against it. It is useless to attempt compliance with it; even if we do all we can, we will not be justified before God.

Here then we find the reason why a mightier and better than we had to come, namely Christ, the Son of God, who, though without sin, was circumcised as sinners were, and made Himself subject to the Law in all humility, that He might abrogate it, and liberate us who never could bear its burden, and consequently would have remained under the curse and wrath of God. Our own experience, as well as the testimony of the holy prophets,

teaches us this. What else but this could have prompted the holy prophet David to say, in the 19. Psalm, verse 13: *Delicta quis intelligit?* “Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults.” Also, Psalm 143:2: “And enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified.” Again, Psalm 130: “If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand?”

These and other expressions plainly show the impossibility for man to say that he has satisfied the Law or that, by means of his works, he has escaped the wrath of God. Since, then, we are thus under the bondage of the Law, and cannot appear before God, nor have that trust in Him which we should have, it follows that we must have something more effective than the requirements of the Law, even the tidings of the holy Gospel, in which our Lord and Savior declares unto the Jews and unto us, that we are condemned by reason of our sins. Nor are the Jews benefited by their circumcision, for it does not free from sin, as the prophets state: They are circumcised as to their body, but their hearts are uncircumcised and unclean. Our redemption rests on the fact, declared by the Gospel, that our Lord and Savior, Christ, on whom the Law had no claims because of His holiness, put Himself under the Law, and even was circumcised, that He might find an occasion against it and be able to say: Listen, Law, thou didst treat me, the Master, as a servant; for this thou must serve me in turn and be my slave and prisoner.

This supremacy of Christ our Lord over the Law He renders ours, thus depriving it of its judgment against us poor sinners, and acquitting us. Not that we are to be indifferent about it, or may now live as we please; but our shortcomings are forgiven and canceled to our souls' salvation.

Circumcision is, therefore, entirely done away with, and unnecessary for those who believe in Christ. They are exempt from this and other burdens of the Law; they have forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life through Christ. Hence they can boast and say: The Law avails me naught, nor circumcision, but this avails that I believe Christ was circumcised for me, that I have Him for my surety who paid the debt which I owed the Law on account of my sins. In His innocence I find comfort and can say: The Law for a period ruled in heaven as a master, accusing us at the throne of God, nor could we prevent it; the charges against us were just, and we could but admit our guilt. Now this is changed, since by the circumcision of

Christ we are redeemed from the circumcision of old and from the curse of the Law.

My circumcision, my love towards God and men, my obedience, are all naught; I will not trust in them. My entire confidence, comfort and courage rests upon the obedience, innocence and holiness of Christ. Such confidence and hope cannot fail me; they are sure and firm. Ere I knew this, I thought that I must go to work and fulfill the Law, or be damned. Now I know that neither I, nor any mortal, can carry such a load; it is simply impossible. Christ took this burden from me upon Himself by subjecting Himself to the Law. With the circumcision He manifested His readiness to fulfill the entire Law, in all its details, just as it had been demanded of us poor sinners. This then is my comfort and my happiness.

It is, indeed, my duty to control the old Adam within me, to direct him to do what is proper, else I would be a very disobedient child, which, alas, I am in spite of all watchfulness. We do much that we ought not to do, and we neglect many things which we ought to do, oftentimes falling into gross and shameful sins. In view of this we have only one consolation: "Christ was made under the Law." In this we rejoice, knowing that He was obedient in all things for us. We never can do all that we should, as St. Paul says: "But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." That is: I must do what my flesh urges; and yet as to my faith I do it not, but am sorry for it and am not willingly thus a captive.

The Christian's righteousness consists in a knowledge of himself as a poor sinner, who can never fulfill the Law; yet he despairs not, seeing that his Lord came to his rescue by taking the Law upon Himself and rendering the required satisfaction. A heart having this faith can exclaim: In truth, has my God thus concerned Himself in my behalf? Ought I not then to love such a God who is so full of mercy? Should I not strive with all my faculties to do that which is pleasing in His sight? Thus the soul becomes glad and joyful before God and a true obedience to the Law ensues, not by constraint, but right willingly. Although such a fulfillment of His commandments will yet be very imperfect, on account of our flesh, yet will God be pleased with it, if we have but faith in Christ. Whatever is yet incomplete and impure, in this regard, becomes invisible under the cover and shield of the forgiveness of sins, for Christ's sake.

You have now heard of a two-fold circumcision. The former was ordained of God, and the Jews had to observe it obediently like any other commandment, until the coming of Christ. But this did not secure their salvation, since no one ever satisfied the demands of the Law. Hence, although the circumcision was performed, the Law nevertheless accused and condemned all the Jews before God. Salvation is secured, however, through faith in Christ, who bore the burden of the Law and removed its curse from us. Unto those Jews who believed, and looked for their salvation in Christ, circumcision was an external sign of their justification before God, not, indeed, because of their circumcision, but because of their faith in Christ. The festival of the Circumcision of Christ is, therefore, a gladsome day, on which we approach God with this heartfelt confession: O Lord, Thou didst ordain circumcision to the Jews; unto them and unto us Thou gavest also this command that we should love Thee with our whole heart, and our neighbor as ourselves. Now we confess that we alas! have not kept Thy Law, and that we cannot keep it as it should be kept; we are therefore guilty and well deserve to be lost and eternally damned. This, however, is our consolation and defense, in which we trust, that Thy well-beloved Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, was circumcised, even as sinners are, and willingly fulfilled the entire Law, else He would not have been circumcised on the eighth day as was the custom. This He did on our account; His person had no need of it. We faithfully accept the deed as wrought for us and pray Thee, heavenly Father, for His sake, be merciful unto us, and grant us the fruits of His obedience and holiness. Let us all learn to trust solely in the merits of our Lord and Savior, then will we be secure and be enabled to triumph over sin and death. May Christ, our Lord, grant it! Amen.

Second Sermon For New Year. The Name Of Jesus. Luke 2:21

And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the Child, His name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

One part of the Gospel for this day we have already considered, namely, the *Circumcision* of Christ, in which it was made evident how He became subject to the Law, so that we might be free from its curse. This festival was instituted for the purpose of reminding us of this great blessing.

We now come to the other portion of the Gospel lesson, *the Name of Jesus*. The Evangelist mentions this name especially, since it is of the greatest importance to know it well as a name not invented of men, but brought down from heaven, and announced by the angel, before the Child “was conceived in the womb.” From this we ought all to learn how well-pleasing this name is unto God, for He Himself thus named His Son.

The name Jesus, in our language, means a Savior, a Helper. Some would have it mean a benefactor, but this translation is not so appropriate. Savior is its true meaning. The angel Gabriel gives the reason why Christ should bear this name when he announces to Joseph, Matt. 1:21: “Thou shalt call His name *Jesus*: for He shall save His people from their sins.”

This name we must study with diligence, and carefully remember that this Child is called Jesus because He is a Savior who delivers from the severest and greatest misery, namely, from sin, and not from the insignificant troubles and petty anxieties which this life has in store for this or that individual, and which can but affect our body, our possessions, or some other temporal matter. God has instituted other means by which such perplexities as these are solved or averted. He has given us rulers and

authorities to protect and defend their subjects against lawlessness; He has appointed parents to support and to educate their children; He has given physicians to advise us and assist us in our bodily infirmities, etc. These, however, are all miserable helpers compared with Him who is a Savior and can save His people from sin. He who would possess this Child as his Savior, as Jesus, must ever remember that He is a Helper, not chiefly in the concerns of this life, which are otherwise provided for, as we have stated, but above all a Savior from sin and death unto eternal life. For where sin no longer rules, there death must also yield up his power. Surely, we receive much more of God than we can ever expect to obtain from emperors, or any temporal authorities. If we do not believe that there is a future life, why then, of course, we need no other helpers than rulers, parents, or physicians, whose duty is to see to our temporal welfare. But if we believe that there is a life after this is ended, then, beyond all doubt, we need this our Savior. Neither king, nor father, nor mother, nor physician, nor any one else, yea, not even an angel, can give us that life. It is true, our Lord Jesus will also be with His people in the troubles of this life, and will assist them in their temporal distress, even if kings and parents and friends fail, or are not able to assist. Yet this is not His chief nor highest office; hence we do not preach of it especially.

His special office is to save from sin, from eternal death and the dominion of the devil; hence He proclaims His name Jesus, to be known by all sinners, for they need a Savior. If there were no hell, no dominion of the devil, no eternal punishment or torment, men might live without Jesus the Lord; for then when one dies all would be at an end, as it is with a tree when it falls, or with a cow when she dies. Hence those who do not believe in God nor in a future life, become a wild, licentious brood. But he who believes in a God will immediately conclude that not all is ended with the close of this life, but there is, beyond this, another life, which is everlasting. That God does not principally concern Himself about the present life of man is evident from the fact that He permits so many wicked scoundrels to live, and to flourish here upon earth. But He has promised us an eternal life hereafter, and the Child Jesus came to be our Savior and our Guide to this future existence. If He brings us into that life, then has He assisted us indeed, no matter what trials we may in the meanwhile be called to endure here upon earth; yea, though they be so severe that it might seem as if God

had forsaken us, it matters not, since we know that He saves unto eternal life. This must satisfy us, let the world wag as it will.

The pope, cardinals, bishops and persecutors of the Word of God, live in security and continue to perpetrate their maliciousness against the Gospel and the Christians. God looks on and permits all this, even as if He were not aware of it, so that sometimes it seems as if He favored the heathens more than His own people. If we are Christians we will not be offended by this. He has vouchsafed to us, through His Son, sure help unto eternal life. He leaves us to ourselves in this our transitory existence, as if He cared not for us, but only to this end, that we should learn to know this Child and to believe in Him as the Savior, who is ready to help when no one else can help us, when our transgressions rise up against us and would deliver us into the pangs of eternal death.

Except in this hour of anguish, we, alas! care but little for our Savior. While we are in health, and have our coffers full of money, we think not of Jesus; our business claims our attention, and we rely upon our gold. The same is true in regard to other temporal endowments; reason, erudition, authority, are all thought sufficient in their proper sphere. A mother can furnish her children with nourishment and other necessaries of life; a physician can attend to his patient, and a lawyer to his client. But when this brief life of ours terminates, when conscience prompts the sinner to confess his guilt before the judgment-seat of God, when the soul writhes in anguish, and when the danger of eternal condemnation threatens, then is the time in which we must have this Jesus the Savior. Neither those in authority, nor father nor mother, nor physician nor jurist, yea, not even an angel, nor any other creature, can then, in that awful hour, bring us assistance. Where will you seek for help or counsel? Where else but with this Child? Yes, here alone, for Jesus is His name; so called because He can and will be present with His help wherever earnestly implored.

Be careful then, for all thy welfare is at stake, that this dear name is not changed for thee; let them not substitute for the Child Jesus a St. Francis, a Dominic, the order of Carthusians, the mass, vigils, indulgences, the giving of alms, fastings, and such like, as it was among the Papists, for this would be entirely false. Remember, once for all, from sin there is no other Savior to be found, neither in heaven nor upon earth, except this only Child of the Virgin Mary, who is named Jesus.

Whoever seeks another Savior, be it in the order of Carthusians or elsewhere, is surely lost. But he is safe who knows this Child, and can call Him by His own name Jesus. This name is all-sufficient. Let us, therefore, seek for help here alone, and nowhere else.

The devil is, indeed, ever busy to give this Child another name, so that men should fear Him as a Judge, and seek other saviors and redeemers. Nevertheless the fact remains: Jesus bears His name not for the purpose of bestowing upon you plenty of riches and of making you a great lord; all this you have already according to the command of God, Genesis 1:28: "And have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." But our Savior is called Jesus because He is to help us when all things else fail, and when we must leave all our earthly possessions to go into the future world.

This name is not compatible with anything by which men endeavor, without Christ, to obtain forgiveness of sins and eternal life. If a monk supposes, by means of his order, to become reconciled to God, it is the same as if he said: my order shall be called Jesus and shall accomplish whatever pertains to that name. When the pope and his preachers declare that faith alone does not justify, and that good works are needed to insure eternal life, they plainly make good works their Jesus. But this is all wrong. Not what I invent and do shall have this name; this Child alone shall be my Jesus. The pope and his clergy think otherwise, and, alas! we also when we permit our sins to frighten us so that we do not derive the consolation contained in this name, thinking: If we had not been guilty of this or that we might appear before God. The Holy Spirit cannot brook such thoughts, and is determined that this Child shall have His name entirely and alone, so that we must despair of all our own good works, and of those of others, if we would be rescued from sin and eternal death, relying in firm faith solely upon this Child who alone has the name Jesus. Nor have we a right to deny this. Whoever endeavors to rob this Child of His name, as the pope and the Turk have undertaken to do, will, to his sorrow, discover his great mistake.

On the other hand, he who firmly adheres to this name will be secure against the devil and the world. It is a name brought down from heaven by the angel and, by the mandate of God, bestowed upon this Child, even ere He was conceived in the womb. The persecutors of this name, who point to other saviors and helpers, charge the angel Gabriel with falsehood; but he

will cry unto the Lord, saying: Lord, thou didst command me to name and call Thy Child Jesus. Rest assured, these defamers of this name will gain naught, but will come to grief, perishing in their sins, without a God, without a Savior. But those who faithfully accept this name will be justified before God and be with Christ forevermore.

We must, therefore, bear in mind this name, and firmly believe that this Child is the only Savior from sin, death, and hell. If the world hates us for this faith, let it be so; she has her reward. If the wicked do not choose this Child for their Savior, it is their loss; for in the hour of death they will have no comfort; other men cannot help them with their works, nor will fasting, prayer, alms, the mass, the invocation of saints, etc. avail them aught. But let us derive all our comfort and security from the knowledge that God Himself gave this name to the Child, calling Him Jesus, which means Savior. Right gladly ought we then to accept and confess Him as the Redeemer, being assured that though sin and eternal death may stare us in the face, He can rescue us from their power. We know also that God delights in such a faith and is honored by it; whereas He will, surely, be angry with those who either do not accept this Savior or seek for another.

These two parts of our text today, the circumcision and the name Jesus, are in perfect harmony with each other. The child Jesus is circumcised like any other child; and why? He is without sin, and needs not the circumcision to become a child of God. But it is done that His name might be Jesus, that He might be a Savior who could free us from death and all the evils which are the wages of sin. He was circumcised and put under the Law to fulfill every demand of God upon man, so that if our uncircumcised hearts, and the terrible disobedience within us, would cause us fear, we need not despair, but trust in Christ, saying: Alas! we are indeed great sinners and have rebelled against God, but yet we will not despair of His mercy, for whatever we have neglected to do, Christ did for us, and the Law cannot accuse Him of having left unfulfilled even its minutest requirement. Hence the law must acquit, and can neither accuse nor condemn me; I am not alone; Christ is with me; in Him I trust; He has paid my debt and imputes to me His innocence and righteousness, in spite of the Law and the devil, who desire to rob me of this consolation. This is the proper application of the circumcision of Christ and of His name.

If the time permitted, we might here cite the sweet consolations contained in the prophets concerning Christ and His kingdom; who should come to redeem, to justify, and to bestow upon us eternal life. All these prophecies the angel comprehends in the one declaration that Christ should be the Savior of the world, and should be called Jesus. The beautiful prediction of Isaiah, chap. 9:16, is especially applicable here, where the prophet ascribes six names to Christ the Lord, calling Him “Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” All these appellations express the office of this Child who should save us from sin, death and the devil, and help us unto righteousness and eternal life.

Boast¹ then pope, miserable Antichrist, with all thy devilish teachings, which would deprive Christ of this name and represent Him as a severe and angry Judge, whom we dare not approach, and from whom no pardon is obtained, unless it be through the intercession of the saints and many good works! Such a doctrine is a double sin. In the first place, the name of Christ is denied; His office as Jesus, as a Savior, is not acknowledged. Again, this name is transferred to the saints and even to our own works, as if Christ were but His own Savior and delighted in our destruction.

Avaunt thou devil, with thy hellish attempt to make us believe that God is unmerciful, pleased with our despair, and heedless of our misery! Such insinuations are false, for by God’s own command the angel names this Child Jesus. If this name is appropriate and true, it cannot be the will of God that we should perish, but rather that we should live and be saved.

So let this name be our dearest treasure, our firm reliance in every tribulation, and may we never forget that Christ, the Son of God, is our Lord, Jesus the Savior. In Paradise it was said of Him, “He shall crush the head of the serpent,” by which was meant that He would help us against the devil and his forces. May God, the Father of consolation and mercy, increase within our hearts, from day to day, this faith and assurance, and retain us in the same for evermore, through Jesus Christ His Son, our Savior! Amen.

1. orig. “avaunt”.↩

Festival Of The Epiphany. Matt. 2:1-12.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him. In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, and thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come & Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search diligently for the young Child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshiped Him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Part First. – The Narrative.

The name of the present festival designates it as the festival of the manifestation of Christ.

It is supposed that three manifestations occurred on this day, though not in the same year. The first was when Christ was made manifest to the wise men from the East by the star; the second, when He was baptized of John in the Jordan; and the third, when He performed His first miracle at Cana in Galilee. Whether these manifestations took place on the same day or not matters little; the events themselves are glorious, especially the one we commemorate today, the manifestation of Christ to the wise men of the East. For here the Lord desires to reveal Himself to the Gentiles also, and not alone to the Jews, lest these should say that He had come in secret and unknown to men.

The fact that He should be a descendant of the Jews, not as a mighty King, but in such poverty that He should with difficulty find a place in which He might be born, makes His mission very offensive to the Jews even at the present day. It became necessary, therefore, that God should also make Him manifest to the Gentiles, so that His coming would be gladly heralded and proclaimed everywhere, notwithstanding His poverty and privation. Surely it was a momentous event that the wise men of the East came from their far off land, and made so much ado about this Child at Jerusalem, as did Simeon and Anna in the temple, the angels in the air, and the shepherds at Bethlehem. All are busy with this Child, all sing and speak of Him, so that His fame is gloriously proclaimed, to the end that the Jews should become aware of Him and welcome Him.

The Evangelist relates with care, in our present narrative, how the wise men first came to Jerusalem, there to seek Christ. They thought that since Jerusalem was the capital, and this Child was the King of the Jews, they must surely find Him there. In this they greatly err; not in the majestic city of Jerusalem, but in the humble village of Bethlehem they find the Child.

Mark well this fact. If we would come to this Child and find Him, we must not be guided by our thoughts or by human reason, but must follow the Word of God, and not turn from it in the least. As soon as we lose sight of the Word we go astray. The Child has indeed a great and glorious name, but yet He is poor and lowly; hence He will not be found amidst the great and pompous rulers at Jerusalem. We must, therefore, follow the example of

the wise men, believe the Word of God, and not be led astray by the gaudy show of this world. Whoever wanders from the Word, ignoring the testimony of the Scriptures concerning this Child and judging from external appearances, will certainly be mistaken and not find Christ.

The Papists are an example of this. They disregard the Word, and represent Christ as it pleases their fancy. It by no means pleases them to have Him only as a Savior; hence they add their own good works and devotions, regarding them as equally efficacious with Christ the Savior. Thus they call upon the Virgin Mary to intercede for them with her Son, regarding such prayer and intercession as a Savior. This is all vanity. Whoever gropes for Christ without the Word of God will grasp the devil, who then instills into the heart the thought that Christ is a judge and taskmaster, and that whosoever would appear before Him must have the intercession of the saints. The result is that the Papists have a greater confidence in the Virgin Mary and in the mediation of the saints than in Christ the Lord. This always must ensue when the Word is neglected. No wonder then that the devil seeks with all his might to seduce us from the Word of God and to direct us to our own thoughts. He knows full well that this would be his gain and our loss.

The chief requisite for us is, therefore, to have implicit confidence in the Scriptures, and to judge divine matters only as they teach us. But it is a very difficult task to convince men of this necessity. It seems almost impossible for many, in regard to the Sacrament, to simply accept the Word; they insist on judging concerning it as would some irrational animal; they see but bread and wine, and straightway decide that the body and blood of Christ are not there, evidently observing merely that which is visible, while they wholly disregard the Word. The husk they regard as of the greatest importance, leaving out of sight the kernel, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The wise men at first indulged in similar thoughts concerning Christ. As soon as it was made manifest to them that the King of the Jews was born, they start directly towards Jerusalem, under the impression that He must, surely, be found there in a magnificent palace and a chamber of gold. And what other thoughts could they have had of a king? Yet such opinions, because they have no Word of God to rest upon, must prove fallacious. They were mistaken; they do not find this Child in Jerusalem, though this

was the holy city and residence of God. To find the Child at all they had to obey the Scriptures; these are the proper star and radiant sun which direct us to Christ.

In this the wise men furnish us with an excellent example of a living, powerful faith. Immediately on hearing the words of the prophet Micah concerning Christ, they follow them implicitly and put aside all other expectations which they had entertained. Nor are they offended when turned away from Jerusalem, the city of God, and from His holy temple, and are directed to the manger at Bethlehem. They might have been offended at this, for they had come to find the king of the Jews, and not a beggar. But they simply obey the words of the prophet Micah, disregarding everything else and putting aside all human reasoning in regard to their course.

Such an exhibition of faith may well be set before us as a bright example. I doubt not but that I myself, if I had been in their place, would have gone to the temple under the supposition that because it is the dwelling of God, the home of the priesthood, and the place of devotion, it must of course be the place where this Child should be found, if found at all in this world.

But the plan of God was otherwise. He will not manifest His Son among the great prelates at Jerusalem; just as at the present day the pope, with his multitude, has Him not. God desired utterly to abolish the Jewish priesthood, with its authority and everything pertaining to it, inasmuch as the Jews placed all their confidence in it and boasted of their temple, thinking it sufficient to be priests and Levites and the chosen people of God. Such pride could not be endured of God, and hence it happened that their priesthood, their temple and their ceremonies, of which they were so proud, had to be abolished. But the poor and lowly Bethlehem was to be honored as the first abode of the Son of God on earth.

This, then, is the first part of our narrative today. It teaches the important and necessary lesson that the wise men who sought Christ, did not find the new-born King in Jerusalem, as they had expected. On the contrary, to find Him at all they had to consult the prophet Micah. As soon as they became aware of His prediction they dismiss their own thoughts and, right willingly, leave the holy city Jerusalem, directing their course toward the humble

village of Bethlehem. God immediately gives them new comfort again by sending them the star to guide them from the precincts of Jerusalem, with its brilliant light, even to the very door where the little Child was to be found. And they needed such comfort; for there they find naught but poverty and want. Joseph and Mary are strangers there; the Child lies in a manger; scarcely a drop of water is their own.

What a sorry situation for a king! If it had been the intention to mock these people, every thing would have been adapted to the end. But these pious men were not offended; they firmly believe the words of the prophet Micah, and trust in the star which has guided them hither. In spite of the poverty surrounding the Child, they fall upon their knees and worship Him, opening their treasures and giving Him presents. This is the narrative of our Gospel lesson.

In this connection we must remember, above all, the exceedingly great blessing bestowed upon the Gentiles. God calls them also into the kingdom of Christ, and accepts them as His people, although they are not circumcised nor subject to the Law, as were the Jews. In this we, who are of Gentile origin, have a sure declaration that we need not despair, as if Christ had not come for us, but that we can have Him as our Savior as well as the Jews, though we are not of that people whom He called His own.

The wise men of the East were heathens. They had their own priests and manner of worship, which was not in accordance with the Word of God. They were also uncircumcised. Nevertheless they come, as strange and unknown persons, to the true light, to Christ, and faithfully accept Him. He also accepts them, and receives their adoration and their gifts. This is told us for our consolation, that we should praise God who has, in Christ, established a kingdom upon earth into which we also are called, not on account of our merits, but through the mercy of God, though we were not of His people.

Again, we ought to learn from this narrative how to conduct ourselves towards Christ our Lord; to avoid all offense, to seek Him with our whole heart, to adore Him as our Savior, and to confess Him before the world, even as did the wise men in our text. And, inasmuch as His kingdom upon earth has no outward power and glory, and is persecuted and oppressed on every side by the world and Satan, we ought cheerfully to give of our

money and of our possessions to aid in its extension and increase. For, surely, we of the present day are as well able as were the wise men of old to open our treasures for Him. And, furthermore, the Gospel declares Matt. 26:40: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

Therefore, whoever with his money and property assists poor, indigent and forsaken persons, or contributes liberally to the support of schools and institutions, in which young persons are educated in the Word of God and in the sciences to become useful in the service of the Church, gives in reality his offerings unto Jesus, who was born into this world poor and needy, yea, as a little Child, without even the necessaries of life, and who was persecuted by the tyrant Herod, so that He had to flee from His native land into Egypt.

For this flight and long journey God provided the necessary means by the wise men for the little Child, for Joseph His foster-father, and for the Virgin Mary. Their gifts were undoubtedly valuable, for we read that “they opened their treasures.” Because they acknowledged this Child as the Son of God and the eternal King and Savior, they, beyond all doubt, gave Him rich and valuable gifts. Poor and needy Christians, who suffer persecution, ought from this to derive cheer and hope. Ere God will permit a poor Christian to suffer want, or to die of starvation, He would surely furnish assistance and consolation, even if He had to send the benefactor hundreds of miles. This comfort we derive from the example in our Gospel today.

Part Second. – The Prophecy of Micah.

Besides the narrative, we have in our Gospel lesson to notice especially the prophecy of Micah, which portrays Christ with inimitable beauty. The prophecy is this: “And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.”

God declared in this prophecy, as the Jews themselves testify, that the birth of Christ, the Lord, might be expected in Bethlehem. This was a most distinguished honor, making of humble Bethlehem a thousandfold more glorious city than Jerusalem ever was. Though the prophet declares that Bethlehem is small and of low estate before the world, the Evangelist changes this expression and says: “Thou art not the least,” inasmuch as God

conferred on this little Bethlehem the honor to become the birth-place of His Son. A greater honor than this never happened to any city in the whole world.

The words of the Evangelist with which he praises Bethlehem are most glorious: “For out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.” This is the joyful text which teaches us how to regard Christ, and who He is. Though poor before the world, though a despised and humble person, born in an insignificant hamlet, He is nevertheless “Prince and Governor” over Israel, over the people of God.

The nature of this principality we learned on Christmas from the tidings of the angel, who also called Christ a Lord, not a tyrant who would torment and oppress the people. The prophet intentionally says: “Bethlehem, though thou be little,” because he means to say: If this Governor desired to be great and glorious before the world, He would surely have selected another place where He might be born. But He comes without pomp, without violence, without estate, without money, without sword and muskets. He disregards the great and mighty cities, Jerusalem the most holy, Rome the most powerful, and others of the kind, and chooses for His birth-place the poor and lowly Bethlehem, so that one might judge, from the very place of His birth, what a Governor He would be: poor and mean before the world, but rich in spirit and all heavenly gifts.

Though His title is “Prince and Governor,” yet neither the circumstances of His birth, nor the place where it occurred, nor anything that He possessed upon earth, exhibit a royal splendor or a princely glory. Yet He is endowed with majesty and glory far beyond that which the world possesses, and is rich in that, in which the world is poor indeed. He is the Just One, the world is full of sin; He is eternal, the world is transitory; He is Master over the devil, while the world is ruled and goaded by him; He is holy, the world is wicked; He has a merciful God, the world is under divine wrath; He is Lord of the life everlasting, the end of the world is death. Such is the dominion and glory of this Child to be enjoyed by His people. His aim is not to make you great in temporal matters; He Himself is poor and lowly; yet He will rescue from dire necessity, that you may be saved and His name may be glorified. Let no one, then, expect to obtain money, or the goods of this world, from Him. All these might be expected at the hands of the pope and his followers. The pope elevates his creatures to high positions, and

distributes among them wealth and domains, as Daniel prophesied. But the sovereignty of this Child manifests itself in the forgiveness of our sins, in our justification and sanctification, in the gift of the Holy Ghost, in our redemption from the bondage of the devil and of death, and finally, in the transfer from this world into heaven.

To this end faith is necessary, and a firm adherence to the Word of God. If we forget the Word and follow our own thoughts in this, we shall lose Christ as a Savior entirely, and will have to regard Him as a stern Judge, who is to be shunned as we would the devil, by whom we are afraid of being seized on account of our wickedness. Our Lord and Savior Christ is no such ruler; He will not torment us, but is “the Governor and Ruler of His people Israel;” He rescues from sin and ensures the mercy of God. His people are the poor, miserable sinners, who fear and tremble on account of their sins, and long to be at peace with God. The prophet describes Him in a most appropriate manner as a prince not of this earth, and yet, though of heaven, full of mercy towards all who believe in Him, whom He shall free from sin, the devil, death and hell. Well may we rejoice in such a Lord.

The scribes quote the prophecy of Micah thus far only, being, in all probability, afraid that this was too much already; for they could see well enough, that it was the determination of Herod to destroy this King of the Jews; hence they are silent as to the remainder of the prediction of Micah. Their intention was to say: We know of no other king of the Jews but Herod. They are satisfied with the mere statement that a prince of the Jews would be born in Bethlehem. But the prophet, though now dead, says more than this when he describes what kind of a ruler and king this Child would be, as to His person, namely: “Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”

This declaration of the prophet was not mentioned by the scribes to king Herod, because very likely they did not comprehend it themselves. And, in fact, it is somewhat difficult, and not so easily understood as the other portion of the prophecy that Christ should be born in Bethlehem and be a Ruler over His people Israel. This can easily be understood, for it states distinctly that He would be of the human race. But the prophet adds: “His going forth is from eternity, before time was;” that is, He is also from eternity, and does not begin to exist at the time of His birth in Bethlehem. In Bethlehem He was born, it is true, and there began His earthly existence;

but He had another going forth which is thus stated: "From of old, from everlasting." The words of the prophet dare not be altered. He says: *ex te egredietur*, "of thee shall He come forth." The chief priests and the scribes explain the term "come forth" correctly in this connection as being equivalent to being born; just as we say in English He comes from here, or from there, meaning thereby that he was born there. Now these words must have the same meaning when the prophet, immediately afterwards, says: *Cujus egressus ab ante a diebus mundi*, that is: " His going forth is from eternity, before the beginning or the division of time."

If, therefore, we would know whence this Child is, we must attentively listen to the prophet Micah, who says: He is of Bethlehem. But is this all? is He not also from elsewhere? Yes, He was begotten before the world, or the heavens, or the sun and moon were. This cannot be expressed in words, and means that He has no beginning. It was not intended that Herod or the Jews should understand this, nor were they worthy of it.

This, then, is the King and Ruler born in Bethlehem, true man in reality. Yet He is more than this, for He comes forth and is born before the world began; that is, He is the true eternal God, also true man, of our human nature.

At these facts the world is perfectly amazed. It cannot harmonize these two births, nor can it believe that this Child had His "coming forth," or birth, ere the sun or moon were created. The Jews never could endure this, and many abominable heresies arose against this article of faith. But let us, who have the Word of God, carefully meditate upon it. If Christ was born before the world was, of whom could He be born? Of whom else but of God? Even reason must admit this, if she admits that God created the heavens and the earth. For God, and nothing else, existed before the world was. If this Child, then, was born and went forth ere heaven or earth were in existence, He must be born of God, yea, must be God Himself, for besides God and the creation there is nothing that exists.

A correct understanding of these words of the prophet is of paramount importance. If Christ had been merely human, death would have overcome Him, as it does every human being. The fact that He was born of a virgin would have availed Him nothing, for the creation of Eve by God from a rib is a greater miracle than that a virgin should give birth. A virgin is a female,

created for the very purpose of bearing children; hence, neither the devil nor death would have cared a whit for the birth of Christ, though He was born of the Virgin Mary. But the efficacy of His birth consists in the fact that the Virgin Mary brought forth not only a son, but a son who was born before the world was. Thus it happened that the devil, and death, and the whole realm of hell, were subdued when they foolishly ventured to attack One who had His going forth and birth long before the world was. If it were otherwise, if His going forth had first begun at Bethlehem, surely death would have swallowed Him up as he does you and me, or as he did the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist, and other great saints. But His “goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting;” hence death, who thus far had devoured all men, was put to shame when he approached this Child. Christ was God, He could not sin, nor could He be accused by the Law, and therefore death could not consume nor the devil condemn Him. Yet because He also was born in time, in Bethlehem, and came into this world like any other child, He had to die. But the devil and death were caught in their own trap, for they looked but to His birth at Bethlehem. On account of this going forth, as a child in this world, He suffers Himself to be slain; but as soon as He is buried He exclaims: I am from everlasting, and bursts with force the bonds of sin, death, hell and the grave, which could not hold Him.

This message the prophet brings unto us, and tells us plainly of this Ruler that He has two goings forth, that is, two natures; that He is one Person and not two, and yet in that one Person, at the same time, true God and true man. Hence we must say; Christ is the Son of the Virgin Mary, and from her breasts He drew His nourishment, increasing in body like any other child; but He was also born of the eternal Father, the ever-living God, ere the world began. These two natures, the human and the divine, are so inseparably united that they constitute one Christ, who is true God and true man. The chief priests did not speak of this to Herod, for they knew nothing of it, nor would that miserable tyrant have been worthy of such an announcement.

If we desire to become well acquainted with this most wonderful birth, we must begin our contemplation of it as it occurred at Bethlehem. The prophet also observes this order when he first speaks of the incarnation of Christ, and dwells upon it more minutely than upon His birth from eternity. For if we wish to know the disposition of God toward us, we must first

learn what He did for us here upon earth, and how He manifested Himself among men; after that we will also learn, as the text further teaches us, how this Child is from eternity. Such a revelation will then be free from all terror to us, full of joy and comfort.

Here, however, a most unfortunate obstacle presents itself, since, through idle and impious curiosity, we first direct our attention to the providence of God. The question is asked: If God foreknew all things, why did He not prevent the fall of man? Why does He permit the world to continue in its sinful course unto damnation, if He has the power to convert it and to make it pious? etc. Whoever begins his study of God with such questions will surely come to grief. Lucifer fell because he exalted himself beyond his sphere. This course must be shunned.

If we desire to proceed with safety, and to become advised as to the nature of God, we must begin our investigation here below, as does the prophet when he first looks towards Bethlehem, and then towards heaven, into eternity. Christ also instructs as in this regard: "I am the way, the truth and the life. Philip, he that has seen me hath seen the Father." John 14. He who refuses this advice and begins with soaring speculations as to how God governs the world, how He punishes and consumes, will fare badly, and that deservedly. The wise man, Proverbs 25, says: "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing."

True wisdom, in learning of this Child, will first direct its course to Bethlehem, there to hear what office He shall have in this world, that He shall be, as Micah says, a Governor, who will redeem His people from sin and death. If this truth is well learned, if the Child in the manger has been found, and seen, and accepted, then it will follow, of itself, that He will be known not merely as the Son of Mary, but also as the Son of God, born of the Father before anything was created. This knowledge will give joy and safety, since through this Child we become the recipients of the mercy of God, whom we otherwise never could regard as a gracious God. This then is the lesson concerning the Child Jesus at Bethlehem.

Here we must also observe the shameful conduct of Herod and the scribes toward this Child. Herod persecutes and the scribes scorn Him. It pertains to the mysterious dealings of God with men to exhibit clearly to them divine texts, so that they preach of them, and sing of them, and

converse about them, and yet do not understand one word of them. So here. The scribes explain this text; Herod, following its directions, sends the wise men to Bethlehem, yea, the hypocrite even adds: “Go and search diligently for the young Child; and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also.” Yet neither Herod nor the scribes understood one word of what they said; they had the shell, but missed the kernel.

In like manner God deals in our day with the wicked, ungrateful Christians: not merely with the Papists, who also have, and read, and know the Word of God, but even with our people, who have the Gospel and speak of it, but do not comprehend one word of it. If they did, they would prove it in their lives. The scribes and Herod take the words of the prophet upon their lips, but think you they, if they understood them, would lazily remain at home, and neither seek nor worship the young Child? That they themselves disregard the sayings of the prophet is a sure sign that they understand nothing of what they preach to other people.

The true believers have a great advantage over the unbelievers in this, that they not only hear these words, but also understand them, deriving much happiness and consolation from them. Thus we are convinced that the world, the pope, the proud citizens and land-holders, though excelling us in wealth, power and honor, are far beneath us in this respect, inasmuch as they do not understand the Word of God, though they may hear and even teach it. Their life shows plainly, as was the case with the hardened Jews, that having ears they hear not, nor do they see with their eyes.

May God in mercy guide us, as He did the wise men of the East, by the star of His holy Word, to find His Son Jesus Christ, and may He keep us in the true faith for ever and ever! Amen..

Second Sermon For Epiphany.

The Baptism Of Christ. Matt.

3:13-17.

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade Him, saying, I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him: Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered Him. And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and, lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

We have already learned, my hearers, how the Festival of the Epiphany derived its name from the manifestation of Christ, not only by the star, but also by His baptism in the Jordan. And since this latter manifestation is by far the most important and comforting, it would not be amiss if we would call this day the Festival of the Baptism of Christ and of His manifestation in the Jordan, when He was thirty years of age.

The Evangelist relates this occurrence with much care. We are told that Christ, who thus far had lived in retirement, not yet having entered upon His office, departed from Galilee, coming to the Jordan unto John to be baptized, as did the sinners who confessed their sins and desired forgiveness. At this John was greatly astonished, deeming himself unworthy to baptize Christ. But Jesus said: "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness;" that is: If poor sinners are to be made righteous and to be saved, thou must baptize me. I became a sinner in

behalf of all sinners, and must therefore do what God demands of them, so that they may be made righteous through me.

The Son of God, who had no sin, was baptized, and did what He was not obliged to do, for our consolation and as an example for us. We indeed, poor, miserable and corrupt as we are, not only neglect to do what we ought to do, but are even guilty of open rebellion against God; and to speak of any work of supererogation, on our part, is sheer nonsense. Let us then bear in mind this fact that Christ, the Son of God, who instituted holy Baptism, was Himself baptized, and enjoins that the ordinance of Baptism be retained in the Church, and that all who desire to be saved shall be baptized.

Surely, they who do not appreciate the occurrence in our text, but despise Baptism, or speak of it in an unbecoming manner, must be accursed people whom the devil has polluted and blinded. Why should you hesitate to have yourself or your children baptized, if even the Son of God was baptized? Why should you be so proud, yea, so blind and foolish, as to despise this holy and saving ordinance? Even if Baptism were useless and would benefit us nothing, ought we not to be ready, nevertheless, to be baptized from mere reverence for the Son of God, who also was baptized?

Besides this we learn, from the occurrence before us, what the benefits of Baptism are. We see how God in heaven manifests His mercy at the Baptism of His Son. The heavens, firmly closed before, now open, as the Evangelist relates, and an aperture is formed through which we can look in and see how henceforth, there is no barrier between God and us. He, God the Father Himself, is present and says: "This is my beloved Son," etc. Tell me, is not this a most glorious revelation and a sure sign that God is pleased with Baptism, which His beloved Son sanctified with His own body, and that He is present in it?

If we wish to keep a festival of the manifestation of Christ, why should it not be this manifestation, in which God reveals Himself so potently as Father, Son and Holy Ghost? Yea, God the Holy Ghost is also present, and that too in a pleasing shape, as an innocent little dove, which is the most gentle of all birds, without malice and bitterness. This is a token that God will not be angry with us, but will rather assist us, through Christ, to become pious and happy.

Here, then, we have a twofold manifestation: First, of God the Father omnipotent and eternal; secondly, of the Holy Spirit. These manifestations occur at the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan, who was baptized for us, not only to give us an example, but also to exhibit the mercy of God, so that we should have faith in this Baptism and use it, knowing that God is merciful unto us if we follow this example and are baptized, as Christ has ordained.

The Father, however, does not manifest Himself merely by opening the heavens, but He is also heard speaking from heaven with a voice which ere this no one ever heard, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Truly, this is a different sound from that heard on Mount Sinai, where God also spoke from heaven, but in such a manner that the earth trembled, and the mountains quaked, and all the people were filled with fear of death.

It is no such awful voice of God which we hear now; He speaks full of love, and grace, and mercy. He says, as it were: Turn hither your eyes, ye sons of men, and see what takes place. You observe that John now baptizes a man in the water of the Jordan, just as he baptizes other persons. If you wish to know what manner of man this is, listen to me: "He is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." You need not be afraid of Him. He stands there naked like other men, without sword or any temporal power. Nor need you be afraid of me, for I do not now come with thunder, with lightning, nor with the sound of trumpets, as I came on Mount Sinai, but with a friendly token and with an emblem of grace.

All this is done in the most affectionate manner. The Son of God, innocent and wholly without sin, stands in the Jordan and is baptized; the Holy Spirit like a dove comes upon Him in the presence of John, and God the Father speaks with us very affectionately, telling us that He does not send to us an apostle, nor a prophet, nor an angel, but His only Son, in whom He is well pleased. By this we are directed to have all confidence in the Son, for God Himself condescends to announce to us all, at the time of His Baptism, that He is His well-beloved Son, as though He should say: If you desire to have a gracious Father, your wish can now be realized; only cling to my Son whom I love, and I will love you also, for His sake, if you hear His voice. Hear Him, therefore, and do His bidding. As to His person He had no need of Baptism, just as little as of circumcision; He is without sin. The Baptism of John I indeed ordained on account of sinners, so that all

who would confess their sins, and repent of them, and desire to be freed from them, might come to this Baptism in the sure faith that I would be merciful unto them. Why then is my Son baptized who is no sinner? Not for His own, but for your sake, who are sinners. He took upon Himself your sins, and of these He desires to be freed, so that you might be saved and your sins no longer stand on record against you.

The Evangelist relates all this very beautifully when he says: Christ answered John, who opposed Him, “Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.” That is: The righteousness of the whole world depends upon this Baptism. Since I have taken upon me and bear the sins of the world, I must, in order to redeem the world, do what God demands of sinners, namely, to be baptized of thee. Do not, therefore, prevent this labor of love, but as I willingly present myself for Baptism, in behalf of a sinful world, so do thou cheerfully assist, and baptize me, that the wrath of God may be appeased and sin subdued. With this thy Father Everlasting is pleased; He speaks with us from heaven, directing us to His Son in these words: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” This He said for our consolation, that we might appropriate this Baptism and fully believe that the wrath of God is now appeased, that our sin is removed through the Baptism of Christ, and that God will henceforth be merciful unto us for the sake of His Son.

This voice from heaven ought to be listened to with the most profound attention, and this glorious manifestation, in which God opened the heavens and sent down His Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, ought to be treasured up in our hearts, and should always be present before our eyes. Yea, we ought ever to hear that gladsome voice: Here you have Him, my Son, my heart, my richest treasure, my all, even myself. And the Son – what of Him? He appears like a poor, needy sinner, and comes to be baptized of John in the Jordan. Thus we see God manifesting Himself, most graciously and affectionately, in a threefold manner, in correspondence with the three persons of the Godhead; and this for the purpose of enabling every one to understand how God would no longer chide nor be angry with these who would accept Christ as the Lord, relying upon His word and work. God here declares that He will be well pleased with all that the Son desires, says and does.

O, how happy we would be if we listened to the voice of Christ and would rely upon it with our whole heart! Accursed and miserable people are they who heed not this voice, but go on as though it had not spoken. The wretched minions of the pope even blaspheme and rebel against this voice, when they assert that the Father is well pleased not only with Christ, but also with the monks, the priests, the mass, with pilgrimages and the like. Surely, whoever thinks upon this as he should, would much prefer death to living with such blasphemous and miserable people, who do not honor nor prize the mercy and kindness of God any more than these Papists do.

Therefore, beloved children, heed this voice While you hear it. But a few years ago we knew naught of it; the heavens were closed and we were compelled, by the devil, to hear the monks preach of purgatory, of apparitions, and other lies. Now, thanks be unto God, the pure doctrine is again proclaimed, and we need but to hear it and to heed it. The world will not do this; but we ought, upon this day, to give heartfelt thanks to God for His great kindness, for the manifestation of His heart and treasure, of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, of His Son in Baptism in the Jordan, and of Himself in a voice so glorious and so pleasing.

He who refuses to accept with his whole heart the Son, who stands in the Jordan to be baptized like a sinner, and upon whom the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove, is indeed worthy of damnation; for he refuses to hear the voice of the Father which resounds in his immediate presence. No doubt, a host of holy angels was also there, for where the Father, Son and Holy Spirit manifest themselves, there the heavenly multitude must also be.

Let us, therefore, learn to appreciate highly this festival. The manifestation of Christ to the wise men from the East, by means of a star, is indeed wonderful; but this manifestation is far more important; for These are the true Kings, three in number, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, manifesting themselves together at the Baptism of Christ. If He had so willed it this revelation might have occurred in the wilderness, or in the temple at Jerusalem, but it was to be at His Baptism, for our instruction, that we should ever prize Baptism, not otherwise than as real and new-created saints.

The blasphemous Anabaptists, at the present day, teach that Baptism is mere water. May the devil take such calumniations. For a dog, or a swine, or a cow, it would be well enough to judge thus, since these have but the taste of water; a Christian, however, will not judge according to the senses, but according to the Word. Here is not mere water, but also the word and power of God; as we see at the Baptism of Christ, where God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are present. It is not water alone, but that water in which the Son of God laves, over which the Holy Spirit hovers, and of which God the Father speaks. Baptism is not mere water, but water full of grace and a laver of regeneration, ordained and sanctified of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Accordingly Christ ordained that Baptism should be administered in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

God the Son, with His Body, God the Holy Ghost with His Presence, and God the Father with His Word sanctify Baptism, and are really present, whenever a child is baptized among us. Since, therefore, the entire Godhead is connected with it, Baptism is not mere water, and no invention of men; for although man baptizes he does not do it in his name, but in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, who are there in the act, otherwise Baptism would be of no avail.

Who dares to despise this ordinance, with which the Father, Son and Holy Ghost unite? Who would venture to call such water mere water? Do we not plainly see what spices God has thrown into this water? If we mix sugar with water it is no longer mere water, but becomes claret, or something similar: why then should we endeavor to separate the Word from the water and say it is mere water, as if neither the Word of God nor He Himself were united with it? Such a supposition is false; God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are in and with the baptismal water, as Christ, at the Jordan, was in the water, the Holy Ghost over it, and God the Father revealing Himself in the voice from heaven.

Baptism is therefore a peculiar water which taketh away death and every evil, helping us into heaven and to a life everlasting. It is a precious, sweet water, full of aroma, a healing power, for God is united with it. God is a God of life, and therefore this water which He has blessed must be the true *aqua vitae*, which conquers death and hell and brings eternal life.

It behooves us, indeed, to learn the importance of baptism and to value it highly. We do not baptize in the name of an angel, or of a human being, but in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost; or, as it is expressed in the Acts of the Apostles, in the name of Jesus, which is the same. Whoever confesses Jesus Christ, must also confess God the Father and the Holy Ghost, for Christ distinctly says that He proceedeth from, the Father, and that He will send the Holy Spirit. If we then in truth confess Christ, we will also believe that the Son exists not alone, but in communion with the Father and the Holy Ghost, though the Father and the Holy Spirit may not be mentioned by name.

We must therefore be exceedingly careful not to separate in Holy Baptism the Word from the water wherewith we baptize, but we must confess and believe that God so instituted this ordinance that for Christ's sake we are thereby, through the Holy Ghost, cleansed from our sins and rescued from eternal death. Or why else should the Holy Trinity be present with it? If we then firmly believe that our little children are born in sin, let us be quick to baptize them, that God may accomplish His work in them, according to His declaration that we must be born again of water and the Spirit, and that he who believes and is baptized shall be saved. If we know our infants to be under the dominion of death, let us not be slow to wash them, according to the command of Christ, in this bath of Baptism, that death may be overcome. And thou, my hearer, who art baptized, remember well that thy Baptism is unto thee a seal and guarantee of the forgiveness of thy sins and of the promise of eternal life through Christ. Yea, Baptism has a divine power to destroy death and to purify from sin; wherefore we are baptized with such hope into the death of Christ.

Baptism with its blessings and promises remains efficacious, though we may have fallen into sin and guilt, if we return from our error and do not continue in our wickedness. It will never do to seek forgiveness of sins and yet persistently to abide in them; we must repent and in true faith say: My Lord God has assured me of all mercy, when I was baptized in the Baptism of His Son, and now I will turn back to this grace of God, being convinced that my sins are removed, not, indeed, for my own sake or that of any other creature, but solely for Christ's sake; who has instituted and ordained Baptism, and who was Himself baptized, as though He had been a sinner.

Tell me, my hearers, is not this manifestation far more glorious than that of the star in the East? The letter was enjoyed by only a few heathens, whilst of the former all Christians are partakers. Therefore this festival ought to be known as that of the Baptism of Christ; then we would have an appropriate occasion to preach of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism against all sectarians and against the devil, who allows us, right willingly, the enjoyment of all things, except of the treasure which has real value for us, of which he is ever busy to deprive us, as he successfully did in the Church of the pope, in which nothing, or but very little, of this manifestation in the Jordan was ever preached. Learn well, then, and heed with care that upon this day God manifested Himself with a glorious declaration concerning His Son, which assures us that whatever He says or does in regard to us, or we in regard to Him, shall be pleasing unto the Father. Whoever is obedient unto the Son and keeps His Word, will be a beloved child of God, and will have the Holy Spirit, who also manifested Himself at this Baptism in so beautiful, cheering and pleasing a manner. The voice of the Father also is heard speaking in the most winsome way: Here I give unto you not an angel, nor a prophet, nor an apostle, but My own Son and Myself. Could God have manifested Himself in any other way more gloriously? And how could we serve Him better and please Him more than by accepting His Son, our Savior, whom we ought to hear and obey? They who will not listen to Christ unto salvation, fully deserve to follow the apostles of the devil unto eternal damnation. May God bestow upon us the grace of faith in Christ, and retain us in the same unto life everlasting! Amen.

First Sunday After Epiphany.

Luke 2:41-52.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the Child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and His mother knew not of it. But they, supposing Him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found Him not, they turned hack again to Jerusalem, seeking Him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. And when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said unto Him: Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing. And He said unto them: How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which He spake unto them. And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them; but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

This Gospel is very expressive, especially if we closely consider how we lose this Child Jesus from our hearts. This consideration we will, however, pass by for the present, and dwell upon that which the common man can understand most fully and easily, and which is of the greatest benefit for him.

On the festival of Epiphany you heard that it was so called on account of the manifestation of Christ, which occurred that the new-born Babe might not be unknown, but revealed; for if we had not heard of His birth, it would have been of no avail. Hence it is that during these days we preach also upon other Gospel lessons which refer to the manifestation of Christ. Thus we use the one relating to Christ's Baptism in the Jordan by John, and also the one which speaks of His first miracle, performed at the marriage at Cana, where He manifested Himself as Lord over all. These manifestations took place not only that Jesus should be known among men, but also that He might be acknowledged and praised as One who is more than human, born to have dominion over everything; and also that we should recognize Him as our Savior, upon whom we can depend in every distress and anxiety, and from whom we can obtain our help.

The Gospel for this day serves the same purpose. In it we have another manifestation of Christ. We learn from it how Jesus was not a common, but a peculiar Child, inasmuch as He secretly absents Himself from His parents and oversteps that obedience which other children, according to the command of God, owe to their parents. The Evangelist tells us how this occurred. His parents had to go every year to Jerusalem at the Feast of the Passover, as was required of all the Jews. They took with them the Child Jesus, and when they returned, He tarried behind in Jerusalem. The parents at first do not take especial notice of this; perhaps, because they knew that He often went with their friends. Christ did not spend His youth as a prodigy or in exclusiveness, but conducted Himself like other children; He played with His companions at times; but yet, as the text records, He increased in wisdom and favor with God and man more than other children. His mother Mary, and Joseph, relying on this and supposing Him to be with their company, permit Him to tarry behind. But towards evening, when they had reached the first station for the night, they begin to inquire for Him. When they do not find Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances, they were greatly disturbed; for the Child had been especially entrusted to the mother, and Joseph had been ordered to foster Him with care. Mary, being His mother, was filled with great sorrow and much fear, when He was missing. We may well suppose that they did not sleep, nor eat, nor rest on account of their lamentation, but that they went back those four miles yet by night. The Child however was lost.

Consider what they must have thought and suffered! The first day they find Him not; on the next day they repeat their search, but in vain. On the third day, and no sooner, they find Him. During those three nights they probably slept but little, and were affrighted with many sad and anxious thoughts. Mary must have been especially troubled, and no doubt she thought: God has taken thy Son from thee; He will not have thee any longer as the mother, because thou didst not attend to Him as thou shouldst have done. Joseph also must have come to the conclusion: I am no longer wanted of God as the foster-parent of this Child, since I was negligent in the performance of my duties towards Him, and did not guard the only Child.

Here we must learn that the Child Jesus, our Lord and God, desires to make manifest that His subordination to His mother was not one of necessity, nor of duty merely, but of His own choice, and as an example. He was not only His mother's Son, but also her God and Lord. Hence He occasionally did not observe towards His mother the relation of Son, as we shall hear next Sunday, when He says to her: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" Thus in our text; He declares by His conduct that He is not obliged to be obedient to father and mother, but that He has another Father who is greater and more to be obeyed than either Mary or Joseph. He says: "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" With these words He means to say: I am indeed your Son, yet I am far more the Son of my Father who is in heaven.

Christ manifests Himself thus on our account that we might know Him aright, and believe Him to be not only true man, but also true God. When the mother asks Him: "Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us?" He defends Himself and says: I did not disobey you, nor did I disregard your will, as you seem to think. He claims to have acted aright and to deserve no reprimand of His mother. Mary and Joseph had to learn that their sorrow and anxiety were wrong. They should have remembered what the angels, the shepherds, the old man Simeon, and others had spoken concerning this Child, then would they have known that, although He tarried behind, it was no act of disobedience, since He owed greater obedience to His Father in heaven than to His mother upon earth.

The import of this example of the Child Jesus is to show us how we, on account of our ignorance and blindness, are ever inclined to obey man rather than God. Whenever the question must be answered: Shall we

disobey God or our parents and rulers? we must learn of Christ to say: I must be about my Father's business; otherwise! will gladly obey father and mother, rulers and governors, masters and matrons. In the case referred to, however, we must say: Dear father, dear mother, I have another Father, and His will must be done rather than yours. Mary and Joseph had forgotten this; hence they were reminded of it and instructed at this time.

All this occurred for our benefit. It is our custom oftentimes, when called to serve and obey God, to refuse, and to excuse ourselves by referring to the command of God that we should be obedient to our temporal authorities. This we hear and see at the present day. The adversaries of the Gospel have learned of us to be obedient to the powers that be, and now they make a great ado about this duty, and say: We know well that it is not wrong, according to the Scriptures, to receive the Sacrament under bread and wine, but we must obey the wishes of our superiors. Father and mother and the rulers of our country forbid it, therefore we dare not do it.

But who is the authority to be obeyed? Is it the ruler of the land? Is it father or mother? We answer yes. But have you no authority over you beside these? Whom do you consider Him to be who says in the first commandment: "I am the Lord thy God?" Whenever He declares Himself pleased with anything, or commands this or that, ought we not to say with Christ, in spite of princes, kings, emperors, rulers, father and mother: *Oportet me esse in his, quae sunt patris mei,* "I must be about my Father's business?" Yea, God's Word and will must have precedence; when we have complied with that, then we ought to do what father and mother, what our superiors demand, else we would surely hitch the wagon before the horses.

As Christ was made manifest by the star and at the Jordan for our consolation, as our Savior, as we have already and repeatedly heard, so He manifests Himself again in our Gospel today for our instruction, that we might learn, in all matters pertaining to God, to disregard every one else, whether parents or rulers, or whoever it may be. For in these things we look to another master, to a higher authority, to God; Him we must obey, and do whatever He desires. When we have accomplished His will, then we may heed the will of our parents and superiors, if they demand nothing contrary to our obedience towards God; for this, as has been stated, comes first and must be fulfilled.

I will not mention here the great tribulation, felt by but few, which surely follows the separation from Christ, but will confine myself, in all simplicity, to the Child Jesus, who manifests Himself today in His authority over others, so that He even compels His mother to follow Him, instead of following her as might be expected of a child. This happened that the words of the angel might be fulfilled: "He shall be called the Son of the Highest." Mary was now reminded of these words, that she might not forget them. This manifestation is in perfect harmony with the others, and we plainly learn from it that Christ was more than mere man, as the shepherds and Simeon had already testified concerning Him. The difference between Him and other children He wished to be observed, although He occasionally mingled with them and took part in their plays.

The Evangelist describes in a happy manner what Christ did in the temple. We observe that He did not inquire as to the price of grain, nor how the stock-market ranged, nor what the latest fashions were, but He conversed with the doctors concerning the Word of God; He listened to their explanations of the Scriptures and corrected them, yet in a manner becoming a youth. Let us suppose that they had under consideration the fifth commandment, and that they explained it as having reference merely to actual murders with the hand: we can then imagine how Jesus interposed and told the doctors that this commandment meant much more; that it also forbade anger, wrath, evil thoughts and injurious reports concerning others; that it demanded a friendly disposition towards our fellow men, as He afterwards explains in the Sermon on the Mount.

In such a way as this He manifested Himself here, to the great astonishment of the scribes and doctors; for that a child so young should ask how this or that had to be understood, was something new to them, and undoubtedly caused them to wonder whence came the wisdom and knowledge of this Youth. We must presume that He did not permit any erroneous explanation to pass uncorrected, and beyond all doubt He asked the doctors what they thought of the Messiah, whence He should come, and what His office would be. Of course He preserved through the entire conversation the proper decorum, making upon all the impression that He had obtained His knowledge either from His mother or from some other aged and pious people. Every one who heard Him must have come to the conclusion that this Lad was destined, under the guidance of the Holy

Spirit, for great achievements. It is not unusual that at His age indications are given in children of their character and future development.

This is, briefly, the narrative of the manifestation of the Child Jesus, before His mother and Joseph, of His superiority over other children. He acts without their permission and claims impunity for so doing.

St. Luke concludes the story of our text by telling us: “And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.” This Child then, who on account of His Father in heaven removed Himself for a time from the authority of His mother, now became, of His own free will, again subject unto her and Joseph; for we are distinctly told by St. Luke: “He was subject unto them.” This He did voluntarily, although He was God and the Lord of Mary and of Joseph. In obedience to His Father in heaven He was subject unto them, and also from true love towards His parents, setting for all men an example of dutiful and humble obedience, I doubt not that the Child Jesus did everything in the house of His parents that He was ordered to do, that He went for wood and chips, that He brought in provisions and water, and that He did all this right willingly.

Let our youths mark well this example; let them ever remember that our Lord and Savior, when He was a Child upon earth, did gladly perform the labor imposed upon Him, even if it was small and very insignificant. Let them learn to do likewise, and to imitate this obedience and humility. This is pleasing to God, for He requires in the fourth commandment that all children shall be devoted and obedient to their parents.

The monks in olden times often in their cloisters asked themselves this question: What did Christ do during His youth? Hence they fabricated a book with the title: *De infantia Christi*, which contains many unbecoming drolleries. It is related of a certain bishop, who also desired to know all about the infancy of Christ, that he dreamt of seeing a carpenter hewing a beam, with a little boy at his side who collected chips, and that shortly after a virgin in a blue dress, and carrying a dish, approached, calling the workman and the lad to their meal. The bishop further dreamt that he, overcome with a desire to see what the party was eating, crept secretly up to them, placing himself behind the door, that he then saw how the mother prepared for the child a mess in a little pan, after which the child said: But, mother, what shall that man there behind the door eat? At this the bishop

became frightened and awoke. We will not condemn this fiction; it seems to be the intention of its author to teach how needless it is to endeavor to know, as did the story-telling monks, what peculiar deeds Christ performed when a Child, since He undoubtedly lived with His parents in childlike obedience, conducting Himself as any other pious child would have done.

If we desire to know what Christ did in His youth let us listen to the Evangelist in our text. He tells us: “He was subject unto them,” that is, He obeyed father and mother without complaint. Children and servants, when reading this account of Christ’s obedience, ought to be heartily ashamed of themselves, because they are so often disrespectful and disobedient to their parents and employers. It will not do for us to say, as many often do: If I knew what the Child Jesus did I would imitate Him. The monks say: St. Francis did thus, and thus he clothed himself, at this time he arose, etc., I will follow his example. But does any one know how Christ lived? I answer: This reasoning is false. We are told by the Evangelist: “He was subject unto them.” In these words we have a description of the infancy and youth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What is meant by the words: “He was subject unto them?” Simply that He did such deeds as the fourth commandment contemplates. He assisted His parents in their daily work; He performed all kinds of errands for them, as it became a dutiful child, and did it right willingly. In view of this, all pious and good children should exclaim and say: Alas, we are not worthy of this great honor to imitate the Child Jesus and to do what He did. He gathered chips for His parents, and performed other menial labors, as ordered; what well-behaved children we would be if we followed His example and were quick to do the bidding of our parents, no matter how trifling the task assigned us may be. Thus we see that no volumes narrating the doings of Christ while a Child are needed; He performed His filial duties, such as they are in every well regulated family. He did not run into a cloister, nor did He become a monk, but He went down with them into Nazareth, where He was among other people, where He exercised obedience towards father and mother, and where He suffered Himself to be brought up with care as other children are.

The uncouth and whimsical monks write that Jesus, when a Child, made little birds and other small animals. Such deeds, however, do not pertain to the obedience demanded by the fourth commandment, nor did His parents

require them. Filial obedience includes other tasks which must be performed in a household and which, as we often see, are not willingly rendered. When the Evangelist speaks of His being subject to His parents, he has reference to the fulfillment of such tasks. We ought ever to remember that the Child Jesus blessed such works, and we should be glad of the opportunity to do them. But the world will not be instructed; hence people deserted such works and obedience and, in the devil's name, ran into monasteries, to St. James and other retreats. Every one wished to excel in his works our Lord and Savior, forgetting that these domestic labors, and the obedience of children to parents, were sanctified by the Holy One, the Son of God, who, while a Child on earth, carried fuel, made fire, went after water, and performed other similar household duties, so that we are unworthy to imitate Him.

Hence we ought to learn this story well and deem ourselves happy in the exercise of such obedience and works, for we see that Christ Himself performed them with readiness. Such works are a thousand times better and holier than those which the monks accomplish in their cloisters. The Child Jesus went to no cloister, but remained at home working for Joseph and His mother. In this He set us an example that we might learn how valuable, how noble, and how blessed these labors are which even Christ our Lord performed.

These truths then are contained in our Gospel today: Christ is Lord over all, yet, as an example for us, He was obedient to father and mother, that we might learn, first of all, to obey God, and then, in the second place, to be faithfully subject to our parents and superiors. If we perform both of these duties we can say that we have acted aright, and prosperity and great blessing will be our reward. May Christ our Lord grant us this. Amen.

Second Sunday After Epiphany.

John 2:1-11.

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: and both Jesus was called, and His disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto Him: They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it. And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And He saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was, (but the servants which drew the water knew,) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, and saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him.

This is the first miracle which the Lord Jesus performed upon earth, thereby manifesting His glory unto His disciples, that they, as John distinctly relates, might thus learn to recognize Him as the Son of God and as the true Messiah; for He does here what no other human being can do: He changes that which is created, and makes wine from water. Such a deed can only be performed by God who is Lord over all creation; men cannot do it.

This miracle chiefly serves to teach us who Christ the Lord is, so that with full confidence we may in time of need and trouble hasten to Him to

seek from Him help and blessing, which we shall surely obtain at the proper time. This is the chief lesson of our Gospel today.

But inasmuch as we derive this same truth and comfort from all the miracles of Christ, we will on this occasion dwell principally upon the fact that this miracle was done at a marriage; and we do this to the end that the doctrine concerning matrimony may be well known among Christians. This is a matter of great importance.

The consideration of this subject becomes very necessary since the Papists, as you are aware, look with contempt upon the state of matrimony and highly extol perpetual virginity. We also know, beyond all dispute, how God has rewarded and punished the unmarried clergy, so that they have not only lost all desire and inclination for matrimony, but that the pure love for woman has become nearly extinct in their hearts. Yea, it is astonishing that this wicked, sodomitical crowd in the convents and monasteries of the pope has not long since, on account of the lewdness which followed from their contempt of a married life, been burned with infernal fire and engulfed in the abyss of hell.

This Gospel serves to arouse in us other thoughts in regard to matrimony than are entertained by the pope, so that we do not shun nor hate it. We see how the Lord performed His first miracle at a marriage in Cana of Galilee, in a poor, insignificant hamlet; and that too when He was thirty years of age, when He had been baptized by John, and when He had already begun to preach. This act of Christ is in conflict with the holiness and wisdom of the pope; for according to his notion it was unbecoming for Christ thus to attend a marriage after He had already entered His office, and had been called and ordained of the Holy Ghost to the preaching of the Gospel.

We find here a most excellent and useful example, not merely against the false practice of the papacy which, thank God, is for us dead and gone, but also against all sects which deem it a mark of great holiness to avoid marriage and other civil duties, and to run into deserts and solitudes where one can live with more ease and more quietness than in the state of matrimony; for it will happen in married life that difficulties arise with wife, children, servants and wicked neighbors. It is true indeed, if we leave out of sight the divine institution of marriage and the blessings which God connected with it, it becomes a most undesirable and burdensome state.

Over against this the monks considered their mode of life holy and perfect, but in reality it was, as everybody knows, an easy, lazy, voluptuous, epicurean way of living. They had everything they wished. They deserted the poor in the world, who had to toil wearily for their daily bread, without even having the consolation that their condition in life was pleasing to God.

Although this example of our Lord, given in the Gospel today, is so valuable and appropriate, it is not heeded by these miserable people. It was read in the churches, but no one understood it clearly enough to ask: Why did Christ go to a marriage, if it is so advantageous to go into the desert or cloister? If it is wrong to live in the world and to be married, how comes it that Christ honored a marriage with His presence and glorious miracle?

If this life in solitude and in convents had been arranged for one or two weeks, or for a few years, there might have been some sense in it; but to forswear matrimony forever was a most flagrant contempt of its institution, a desertion of a sacred duty for the enjoyment of ease and quietness entirely opposed to God's command and ordinance.

Learn from this how God, our Lord, Himself honors the fourth commandment. Where there is a marriage there will be, as a consequence, a family, father and mother, wife and child, man-servant and maid-servant, fields, cattle, trades, and labor for daily bread. Christ desires to teach us that such a state of life is one which is blessed, happy, and ordained of God, so that no one should despise, but rather all should esteem and honor it, even as did Christ.

This Gospel is, therefore, an impressive sermon for our young people, since they can learn from it how to serve God at home, and how needless it is to undertake some extraordinary feat, as the besmeared and shorn monkish rabble does. The man of the house who governs his family with piety, who rears his children and servants in the fear and knowledge of God, and in all that is decent and honorable, lives in a blessed and holy state. Thus also the woman who attends to the wants of her children, who gives them meat and drink, who washes and combs them, needs no other employment more pleasing in the sight of God. The servants in the house, man or maid, serve God, if they are obedient to their employers; yea, if they believe in Christ, God is better pleased with them when they sweep the

room or clean shoes than with all the praying and fasting and masses, and all the other so-called meritorious works of the monks.

Let no one, therefore, regard with contempt the domestic life, which is the result of matrimony, nor condemn it, as did the senseless monks, who looked upon marriage as a worldly and unhappy state. Christ Himself is present on a marriage occasion, and thereby blessed the act and everything connected with domestic life. God also manifested by the fourth commandment, which is the most important of the second table, His approval of it, yea, He demands of men that they should honor and respect the family relations.

If thou art a father or a mother, rejoice in thy condition and gladly fulfill its duties, knowing that this is the will and order of God. If thou art a servant, whether male or female, remember that God is pleased with thy services. God Himself instituted and blessed matrimony, and now honors the marriage festival by His own presence and by the performance of His first miracle, after He had already begun to preach the Gospel. Christ could have excused Himself from being present by saying: I cannot come, I must attend to my calling of preaching; the transaction to which I am invited is of a worldly kind, but my office deals with spiritual matters, and hence I must refuse to come. But He who is the Bishop over all does not permit His office and especial calling to interfere with His attendance at the wedding, with which domestic life begins, but by His presence honors and sanctions this deed, so that every one ought now to say: Since my God has so ordained it that I should serve in the state of matrimony and in the performance of domestic duties, whether it be as a servant, as a child, as a husband or as a wife, I will do this right willingly and serve my God with gladness in this condition of life. For I see that Jesus Christ, my Lord and God, the Highest of all preachers, comes to the marriage, thereby not only blessing this ordinance, but also giving the assurance of its continuance and support.

This truth had to be brought to light again in opposition to the pope and the heretics, but it must also be applied again in our day against fanatical factions, such as the Anabaptists and others, who declare that marriage and domestic ties are burdens; that troubles with faithless servants never end; that quarrels with neighbors will arise; that wife and children and relatives may meet with accidents; and that amidst the continual disturbance and

perplexities of married life there is no time nor opportunity to think of God or to serve Him. Therefore, to avoid all these experiences and to escape these burdens, in the name of the devil, they run into convents and secluded spots, and seek ease in the various clerical orders.

Let us understand this, that we may be able to ward off these frantic fellows with their teachings. Here we distinctly see how Christ, when He had come to the marriage, did not separate groom and bride, but suffered them to be joined together, yea, He even assisted that the wedding feast might take its proper course. By this beautiful example He taught how becoming it is to perform diligently the household duties; and again how, if privation ever should come, we need not be frightened, but should see to it that we have faith in Christ; then will we find help from Him who made wine from water, and who so blessed our condition in life that we will ever have enough, though it may seem, now and then, as if we would have to suffer want.

Our daily experience teaches this. If man and wife live together in piety, the Lord their God will abundantly bless their industry, so that they earn much more than they imagine. I venture to say that a pious and industrious mechanic would scarcely undertake to support himself and family with the money which he earns in one year, if that amount were counted out to him in a heap at the beginning of the year. But there is a secret blessing of God connected with all this: we earn a penny today and one tomorrow, and economize accordingly, so that the blessing of God is experienced in this quiet economy. In this way Christ, our Lord, still continues to change water into wine in my house and in thine, if we are but faithful and pious. By His blessing He causes one loaf of bread to supply the place of ten, and one coat to wear longer than otherwise three. If we would but open our eyes, our experience would compel us to exclaim: Lord, in Thee do we trust in the performance of our domestic labors; they also are of Thy institution; Thou didst honor and bless them and still continuest to bless them. Therefore will I cherish my calling and be industrious in it.

The Evangelist mentions particularly that the mother of Jesus was also there. Perhaps she acted as mother of the bride, for she concerns herself much about the marriage affairs, especially when the wine gives out. There seems to have been nothing wanting at this wedding feast but bread and wine. Surely, if matrimony were not pleasing in the sight of God, Jesus

would have told His mother: Woman, thou art too highly honored, and too glorious, to be here and to busy thyself with these marriage affairs; thou, who alone among women art a virgin and at the same time the mother of the Son of God, shouldst be engaged in the churches and in spiritual services only. And, in truth, it is astonishing that the blessed mother of Jesus should perform such menial work and serve as a handmaid at this wedding with cooking and attending to the wants of the guests. All this happened however, as I have repeatedly stated, that we should learn to highly value the state of matrimony, which was so greatly honored by Christ and the Virgin Mary.

Yet this example was of no effect among the Papists, nor is it at all regarded by the disobedient and faithless servants. No one will believe that it is serving God to perform diligently and well the domestic duties, else would the servants and the children zealously and merrily do their work in the house, determined to make a paradise of it by gladly doing the will of their superiors. They should say: No matter if I am now and then reprimanded, since I well know that my calling and position is also a service of my God. Christ my Savior went to a marriage, and exalted it by His presence and the services of His mother Mary; why then should I not esteem this estate and be ready to labor and even to suffer in it? Alas, such servants are scarce; the greater number, though they hear and know this story, are not convinced of the fact that they can serve God in their station at home much better than if they were monks and nuns in the convents. No one takes this lesson to heart nor believes it. The result is that all labor is performed with reluctance and aversion, nor can blessings and success accompany such forced fulfillment of duties. Ought not every maid-servant who is God-fearing and pious, when ordered to cook, and the like, be cheered by the example of the mother of Christ, so that she will say: My duties are like those which the Virgin Mary performed at the marriage, where she gave heed that everything was well done, and even applied herself to the work. Though my task is but an inferior one, and insignificant, yet I will execute it to the honor of God, who has ordered such obedience, and I know that my labor thus performed will be pleasing to Him. The world may ridicule such compliance with the demands of duty, but he who wishes to be a Christian will regard it as necessary and as a proper service of God. Thus can all servants in the house, whether male or female, take pleasure in the work of their several stations; yea, they can

truly exclaim: We praise Thee, O God, for the labor which Thou hast assigned to us, inasmuch as we are thus enabled to serve Thee much better than do the monks and nuns who have no divine command. We however have the command of God in the fourth commandment to honor father and mother, and to serve our masters with zeal and fidelity in the maintenance of their household affairs; hence we will do our work with alacrity and love.

They who are thus content in their position will do their work with cheerfulness and pleasure, and have an Eden upon earth, while God and His; holy angels will rejoice at it. Likewise will the master and the mistress of such servants richly reward them for their faithful and willing services. Trustworthy and pious servants are highly valued everywhere.

It is a fact, however, that people do not act thus, but prefer to go into cloisters, under the supposition that by so doing they can serve God better than if they would faithfully perform domestic duties. Since the fourth commandment has been thus violated by so many who despise the state of matrimony, God justly lets them become monks and nuns, in which condition they torture themselves in utter disobedience of God's will and regulation; for He never sent them there, nor did He ordain any such life as that. We should therefore heed the example in our Gospel, and learn to perform willingly our duties in that station of life which God especially ordained and honored as the fountain and source of all other estates upon earth.

Matrimony and the family relation sustain kings and rulers, not merely because they give birth to these, but because the population and the necessary means for the support of government are dependent upon the continuance of marriage. The householder has to produce the means wherewith all ranks and conditions of men, from the highest to the lowest, are supported.

It then becomes our duty, willingly and obediently, to respect and promote this estate, so that every married person, and every servant, can sincerely say: Lord, thou hast thus ordained it; Thou wast present at the marriage in Cana, and Thy mother, the blessed among women, did upon that occasion what we have to do at home and in the family. Yes, if she did not deem herself above such work, but even undertook it of her own free

will, why should we poor mortals, who are certainly not better than the Virgin Mary, be too proud to perform household labor?

Let all pious and God-fearing married people learn from this that God will not forsake them with His blessing, but that He will be with them and ward off all want as He did here. Still, it must be remembered that married life brings with it many difficulties, and that days of adversity will come. But if Christ is invited to the marriage, that is, if man and wife are pious, and if they faithfully and prayerfully cast their cares upon Jesus, they will be happy and blessed. This lesson you must learn today, that you may ever remain willingly in that station of life which is connected with matrimony, nor be seduced from the performance of your duties by those who falsely say that marriage and house-keeping are of the world only, and in conflict with a true service of God, which can take place only when all domestic pleasures are renounced.

Such notions are entertained in our day by the Anabaptists. Deluded people! They desert wife and child, and boast that the suffering which they thus bring upon themselves augments their holiness. Ah, it is all villainy and hypocrisy; for the burdens which are self-imposed give no pain. They shun domestic duties and cares, which are indeed often painful and trying. These rogues are afraid of difficulties, and run away from them, that they may lead a life of indolence and pleasure. A great penance this, indeed! No, true self-denial can be practiced best by a willing obedience to God's command, which binds us to our family, to our government, to our neighbors, and to our servants; so that we have our hands more than full with the exercise of Christian charity and patience. We must hear and see and endure many things which are very unpleasant; yet we dare not run away, but must say: We will patiently endure all this, for we know that, after all, the blessing of God rests upon a married life. Yes, let us thank God that He instituted for us this happy and blessed state; and if troubles arise He will be our Helper, as He proved Himself to be at the marriage in Cana.

Let us heed the instructions of the Gospel today, and may God give us grace to retain them, so that we may perform the duties of our calling with Christian zeal and alacrity. Amen.

Third Sunday After Epiphany.

Matt. 8:1-13.

When He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshiped Him, saying, Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth His hand, and touched him saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto Him a centurion, beseeching Him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self-same hour.

Our Gospel today relates two occurrences: The cleansing of the leper, and the healing of the servant of the centurion. Christ performed these miracles soon after the delivery of the sermon on the mount, for it was thus ordered

that He should first preach, then confirm His preaching by miracles, that every one who heard Him might know the truthfulness of His teachings, and might believe them readily.

Thanks be to God that we have no longer any need of miracles; the Gospel doctrine has been established by signs and wonders sufficient, so that no one has any cause to doubt them. It is however not enough that those who have received the Gospel profess to be Christians; they must also prove by their actions and life that they have true faith. St. Paul says: The kingdom of God is not merely in words, but in power. Where faith and work correspond, the result will be much fruit. On the other hand it will cause great offence if the life is wicked and does not agree with the doctrine professed.

The two miracles in our text are, however, more than mere witnesses of the truth which had been taught; they are rather examples of faith and of love; for reason even must conclude that these deeds are far beyond all human ability, and will be compelled to say with Nicodemus, John 3: "No man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with Him." We observe at the first glance the compassionate and friendly heart of our Lord and Savior; it needs but one prayer and He is ready to help where all earthly power is of no avail. This evinces His kindness and grace towards the poor, the distressed and the suffering; else He would have done as we are prone to do when out of humor and displeased, turning away with unkind words those who ask a favor. Not so Christ. Scarcely has the leper made known his request when Christ touches him and declares His willingness to grant his prayer. He immediately cleanses him of his disease.

Such kindness must prompt us in all our troubles to come unto Him for help, and to place our entire confidence in Him. But more than this: it ought to prompt us to exercise similar kindness and love towards our fellow-men, with the sole intention to do the will of God and to promote the welfare of our neighbor. Christ seeks neither honor nor reward in rendering assistance; He has but this in view, that man may be relieved from woe and suffering, that the glory of God may be enhanced and His will accomplished.

We do not serve God if we are kind to others merely because we expect a similar return from them. Such a spirit would be selfish. If we wish to serve God and our brother aright, we must not look to our own interest, but

only to the existing want. We must bear in mind that it is God's will and command to assist our fellow-man in his time of need, though we are aware that we gain not even a farthing by it, or perhaps naught but ingratitude; as Christ Himself experienced when He cleansed ten lepers, nine of whom forgot to thank Him, and only one returned with a grateful heart. Christ foresaw this base ingratitude, and yet He helps them when they ask, committing the rest to God in heaven.

Thus also the miracle performed for the centurion proves the love of Christ. He desires to glorify by His deed the love and mercy of God, and to relieve the suffering ones from their pain. This is love, true and pure, having the Word and will of God in view, and nothing else.

The faith which the leper manifests is also beautiful beyond measure. According to the law he was forbidden to appear among men, nor dared he to speak with others; yet he ventured to come unto Christ without fear, falling upon his knees with the prayer: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." In this he expresses his conviction that Christ will be merciful beyond all doubt, and also that He possesses the ability to help where all human power fails. His confidence was not shaken by the fact that Christ passed by in humble array, destitute of all outward glory and splendor. Another praiseworthy trait he manifests: he is not impudent with his petition, but leaves the decision entirely to Christ. If He should deem it best not to fulfill the request, if it should be the will of God, and for his own benefit, that the disease should remain upon him, he is ready to bear the pain and to suffer the agony still longer.

This is not only true faith, but also the proper way to pray. He who believes aright will also pray aright, while he who lacks sure faith will not know how to pray. Prayer must rest upon faith; the heart must be convinced that He is ready to help us from all our misery.

Especially must our faith be firm in those matters that pertain to the glory of God and to our souls' salvation: in the forgiveness of sins, the redemption from the power of the devil and of death, the promise that God will pour out His Holy Spirit into our hearts and preserve us in His Word, so that no tribulation can overwhelm us, and that our faith and love may increase every day, etc. Such truths pertain especially to the glory of God and our salvation, wherefore the heart, when it prays, must never doubt that

God is willing to bestow upon us these favors; for of these we stand in need, and He has vouchsafed them unto us in His Word.

It would be wrong to pray for these blessings as the leper prays: “Lord if Thou wilt,” forgive me my sins, save, etc.; for we ought not to doubt that it is God’s will to do this, since He has in His Word revealed unto us His will in this respect. He desires our salvation, and gave His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice upon the cross for the whole world, that all who accept Him and believe in Him might be saved.

Why then does the leper add to his petition these words: “If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean?” We must here distinguish between the objects of prayer. If we pray for that which pertains to the glory of God and to our salvation, our prayer must be unconditional. The will of God is evident as to these; He desires His glory and our salvation. But it is otherwise when we come to pray for temporal matters. We may be poor, sick, distressed, despised, as all Christians are, and yet be saved. Because such temporal privations do not condition our salvation, but may rather profit us, it behooves us, when we pray for their removal, to do it in the faith that God can and will help; but we should leave it entirely to Him whether He will do so or not. If granting help promotes neither the glory of God nor our salvation, we ought to be willing to bear our afflictions still longer.

If we wish to pray aright, as regards our temporal necessities, we must have an implicit confidence in the power of God, without prescribing to Him the time or the manner of His help. Frequently we lack the knowledge of that which we need, and know not how to pray for it, as St. Paul says, Rom. 8. God, however, knows what will redound to His honor and to our salvation. Consequently we must subject our will unto the will of God, in no wise doubting that He will surely hear us if our prayer will be conducive to His glory and to our salvation.

The example of the leper is worthy of imitation. We must learn to pray with an unwavering heart, trusting in the willingness of God to alleviate our misery in the manner which is best for us. This we must firmly believe, while we at the same time humbly exclaim: Lord, Thou knowest the proper time and place, in Thee we confide, do unto us according to Thy good will. The leper does not doubt that Christ can help him, nor does he question His willingness, else he would not have importuned Him as he did; but at the

same time he admits that it is not for him to say when and how the remedy should be applied.

Such a faith and submission is well pleasing to Christ, wherefore He helps the poor man in the self-same hour and place, yea, beyond all expectation.

In this connection we are reminded of the beautiful sayings of the prophets, Psalm 27:14: "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." Psalm 130:5. 6: "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His Word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning." Habakkuk 2: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." All the Gospel narratives agree in this that help will be granted in the end, though it may tarry for a long time, God does thus intentionally; He tarries for a time with His assistance, that He might then bestow it upon us in rich abundance, as St. Paul writes, Eph. 3.

But why does the Lord send the leper, after he is cleansed, to the priest, there to offer the gift that Moses commanded? We might answer that the Lord desired to exhibit therein an example of benignity. He might have disregarded the priests and the functions which God had assigned them; but this He did not do, that we should learn not to interfere with the rights and privileges of others.

But the principal reason was that Christ wished to make the miracle public, even before His enemies. The priest, by accepting the offering of the leper now cleansed, and by giving him a certificate as to his cure, really testified, that Christ is the true Messiah, in whom he and all others should believe. The prophets had foretold such miracles of Christ when He should come into the world. When Jesus orders the leper to show himself to the priest, and "to offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them," He means to say: They will have to admit that thou art cleansed and entirely cured, but their unbelief will prevent them from accepting me as their Messiah, for which perverse obstinacy they shall surely be punished. This testimony, however, shall strengthen the faith of others, that they may accept me.

The pope has endeavored to use this command as a proof of his auricular confession. Since sin may be likened to leprosy, it was argued that the sinner, to be freed from his guilt, must present himself to the priest. Such reasoning is folly. What do the laws of the Jews concerning leprosy concern us! We have no such priests, and even if we had, it is certain that the lepers were never cleansed by the priests, and that these merely testified as to the fact of the cure.

How then can this establish auricular confession, which is claimed as necessary for the forgiveness of sins, when the lepers had to exhibit to the priest, with their offering, a purified and cleansed body, and not their leprosy?

But we need not spend our time in the confutation of such groundless assumptions; we have upon other occasions sufficiently considered auricular confession. We know of but one necessary confession, when the heart discloses itself before God and confesses its sins. This is a true confession, and does not prevaricate in the manner of auricular and lip-confessions. Even this confession of the heart in the presence of God, does not justify; how then could auricular confession do this? True faith in Christ Jesus our Lord, and full confidence in His Word which assures forgiveness of sins to those who believe in Him, this justifies and nothing else. So much in relation to the first example.

The other miracle, performed upon the sick servant of the centurion, is also a demonstration of the purity and truthfulness and of the authority of the teaching of Christ. It proves Him to be the true Messiah and Christ. But it also exhibits a bright example of firm and implicit faith; yea, the Lord Himself declares that the centurion manifests a faith, the like of which He had not found in Israel.

The centurion is a heathen, nevertheless he sends to Christ in the full conviction that He will not refuse to hear his petition, but that Jesus will help him in his affliction, though he is not of the house of Israel; and in this his faith is manifest. Had it been otherwise he would not, as St. Luke relates, have sent the elders of the Jews to Christ to intercede for him. The sending of these is a proof of the centurion's hope that his prayer would be heard.

Intimately connected with this confidence and faith was a child-like humility. He deems himself unworthy to go in person to Christ, and therefore sends the elders of the synagogue with his request. And when he hears of the approach of Christ, he sends other messengers with the prayer that the Lord should not trouble Himself to come into his house, since he was not worthy of such a visit. He states his belief that Jesus could fulfill his desire simply through His Word, without being personally present. The centurion is so fully convinced of this power of Christ that he adduces his own authority as an example. He says: "For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say unto this man, Go, and he goeth: and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." He means to say: I am but a man, yet my commands are thus respected; how much more effective must then Thy Word be, Lord. This was not only a living faith, but also a glorious manifestation of the same. It would be well for us if we had a similar faith in Christ, who dwelleth with us in His Word so abundantly, though we do not see His person.

The example of this man is excellent, because he depends entirely upon the Word of Christ. He believes that the Lord will grant his request, and that it can be done simply by a word. Upon this word he depends with confidence and joy; he feels assured that if this word is once spoken, his servant will arise in health and vigor.

Let us, who have the Word, learn to imitate the centurion. In it we have the comfortable assurance that God is merciful in Christ, and that through faith in Him we shall obtain the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The great want with us is the faithful heart which the centurion possesses. He is sure that with the Word all other blessings will come. We doubt this, and hence do not appreciate the Word as we should, and turn to other things; yet, the Word is omnipotent and true, as the centurion believed and confessed. Whatever it promises to us we can rely upon with certainty.

This faith of the centurion is so much the more praiseworthy because he was a heathen, and had none of the promises and honors of which the Jews, as the people of God, could boast. It is indeed a peculiarity of faith to make humble hearts, which are not proud nor self-righteous; it satisfies them fully to have the mercy and favor of God.

Let us therefore be comforted whenever we remember and must confess that we are poor, miserable sinners, without any worthiness or merit of our own. We need not despair, if we but firmly cling to the promises of God and have faith in His mercy. Such an assurance is pleasing to God, and He requires it of us. If we deserved His gracious promises, and were not entirely unworthy of them, we could no longer speak of the grace and mercy of God. The centurion could boast of no claims upon God, as did the Jews; he therefore does not come himself, but sends those whom he supposes to have some claim upon the mercy of Christ; still he continues to believe that the Lord, on account of His great kindness and grace, will surely help him.

True faith and true humility are equally free from presumption and from despair. It is the will of God that we should fear Him with an humble spirit, but also without despair; that we should trust in His grace with an unwavering faith, as the 147. Psalm says: “The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy.”

The Jews greatly erred when they imagined that God loved and favored them on account of their piety and good works. They became proud and bold, and indifferent towards their Lord. Hence it is that Christ pronounced such a severe sentence upon them when He says: “Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Their pride and recklessness came from their wicked unbelief. As little as it avails the Jews to be Abraham’s seed, so little does it interfere with the welfare of the Gentiles not to be of the seed of Abraham, if they but have firm faith in Christ, and an earnest longing after the mercy and grace of God. It is the pleasure of God to leave those who are filled to themselves, while He satisfies those who are hungry, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Before God there is neither Jew nor Gentile: “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.” This should prompt us to become humble, and to rely entirely on divine grace.

Thus we see how this Gospel teaches of love, and more especially of faith. We learn the nature of faith, how it humbly relies entirely upon the Word and compassion of God. Whoever has such faith will enjoy its fruits,

as did the leper and the centurion. Where faith in the mercy and love of God rules the heart, there will He also be with His help and blessings. God grant us His Holy Spirit, to awaken in our hearts, such confidence and faith in Christ Jesus our Lord, unto our eternal salvation. Amen.

Fourth Sunday After Epiphany.

Matt. 8:23-27.

And when He was entered into a ship, His disciples followed Him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but He was asleep. And His disciples came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And He saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marveled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him.

The narrative in our Gospel today does not teach us what we should do, since it does not at all treat of works and deeds, but it instructs us what we should believe and how we should be comforted in every affliction and adversity. Hence we have here one of those glorious sermons on faith which people think they understand enough, as if it were a small and common matter. We will divide our subject into three parts, and speak first of affliction and sorrows; then, in the second place, of Christ our Lord and faith in Him, which is the one and only sure consolation and help; finally, we will consider the fruits and benefits which come from such afflictions and faith. These considerations will teach us that the Evangelist here in few words relates to us an incident so comfortable that we would not wish to do without it.

First, then, we observe that the Lord Jesus enters into a ship with His disciples. There was no storm then; the weather was fair and the sea calm, else would the disciples not have entered the ship. But as soon as Christ had embarked with His disciples and they had set sail, a great tempest arose upon the sea, and the ship was covered with the waves as though it would be wrecked.

From this occurrence we can deduce the general statement: Thus it will ever be; when Christ enters the ship it will not remain calm, but a storm and tempest must follow. It will certainly happen as Christ Himself says, Luke 11:21: "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils."

Thus we see in the Gospel how everything is quiet and at rest until Christ begins with His preaching and His miracles, then arises the tumult on every side. The Pharisees, the Scribes, and the High Priests conspire to kill Christ, and the devil rages with all his might. Such a state of affairs was predicted by Christ, Matt. 10: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."

This must prompt us to consider well whether we are prepared to be Christians or not. If we are resolved to be Christians we must be ready to meet this tempest and this strife; it cannot be otherwise. St. Paul says: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

For the same reason Sirach, chap. 2, admonishes all the believers and says: "My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation, set thy heart aright and constantly endure, and make not haste in time of trouble." That is: Go thy way, if thou dost not desire to serve God, the devil will not trouble thee until the end. Again, if thou art resolved to be a Christian and to serve God, thou must be resigned to what will happen; the tempests and the persecutions will not be wanting. Take courage, therefore, and be not frightened when they come. Fear not such tempests; fear God and keep His Word though the world rages. Set not out to gain the favor of the world, and hence never yield on account of its spite and opposition. This lesson we learn from the statement of the Evangelist, that the tempest arose as soon as Christ had entered the ship and had set sail upon the sea.

Further, we learn from this how to answer the wicked and vile traducers, who revile the Gospel and say: Formerly, before this doctrine was preached,

everything was quiet, and plenty prevailed; now there are misfortunes innumerable, parties, wars, seditions, famine, the infidels, and every other affliction. Ask these miserable slanderers of the Gospel, if you wish to shut their mouths: have you never read that as soon as Christ had entered the ship, and had set sail, a tempest arose?

This, however, was-not the fault of Christ, but of the devil, His enemy, who cannot endure Him. Thus the devil still opposes the Gospel, and for the purpose of destroying its influence he causes all manner of disturbances and misery upon earth.

Alas, the blind and hardened people will not perceive nor understand this. They look but to the present trouble and want, and denounce the Gospel as its cause. The benefits derived from the knowledge of God, the forgiveness of sins and salvation, people will not see nor realize.

Not otherwise did the ungrateful, stubborn and wayward Jews act when they were in the desert. While yet in Egypt and oppressed by severe labor, they called upon God to release them from their bondage and woe, promising to be pious. But what happened? After God had freed them from their misery, and when they were in the desert, they forgot it all. They remembered not what they had suffered in Egypt, and thought no more of all their sorrows there, but only of the flesh-pots and the bread in Egypt. They were skilled in the popish method of praising what was good and pleasing, but remaining silent about all their former misery. Hence it happened, when God gave them bread from heaven, that they despised it as inferior to the meat of Egypt. Our nature is so corrupt by sin that we are never satisfied with the providence of God. Surely, great and divine patience alone can tolerate this behavior, and permit such wicked people to live.

If we had been asked, twenty years ago, what we preferred: a year of famine, or the perpetual oppression and exaction of the monks and priests, as it was at that time, I am sure we all would have gladly chosen famine, to escape the heavy, intolerable, and endless torment of the priesthood. For what one year would refuse to yield the other might bring forth; but of this hope we were devoid in regard to that spiritual oppression which seemed eternal and which was augmented from day to day. All such grief and tribulation we have forgotten, and praise the quietude of former days,

regardless of the precipice over which we were suspended, while during that peaceful period we were deprived not only of money and estate, but also of our body and soul by means of false doctrine and idolatry. Besides this, other misfortunes occurred. There were then also, as now, famine, pestilence, war and other torments. Why then blame the Gospel if these plagues occur in our times?

The greatest treasure is the Word of God, and He could not have bestowed upon us a blessing more valuable than His Gospel, whereby we are freed from sin and death. Think then how God must be displeased with the horrible blasphemy which imputes to this Gospel every misfortune at present prevailing! What punishment will have to follow such an accusation? Surely this, that God will close the eyes and hearts of these blasphemers to such an extent that they will be totally unable to observe the glorious deeds of God, that they will become hardened against divine love and mercy, as were the Jews, so that they in the end cannot but resist God, and become the devil's own. Such an end awaits them beyond all doubt, and they fully deserve it. We must suffer wrong and much enmity even where the Gospel is not in vogue; thus also had Rome to suffer war and other evils, long before the Gospel was brought to light.

The devil and our ingratitude are to blame for all this, and not the Gospel. It is the plan of Satan to crush the Gospel, and for this purpose he instigates all kinds of evils; yea, the mightier the Gospel proves itself the more he raves and rages. If we are so very ungrateful for such a great gift, and refuse to accept and use it, nay, even persecute and hate it, God will certainly visit upon us various punishments and afflictions to stay this ungrateful course.

This is the first lesson that we must learn if we wish to be Christians, to prepare for the tempests which will arise. If we are not willing to do this, we will find out to our great sorrow, when death approaches, what a great mistake we have made.

The second lesson teaches us the nature of true faith, how it braves the battle and the storm and comes to Christ, relying upon His help. This fact we must well remember. Our opponents, the Papists, consider faith an inferior matter, whilst they value highly the free will of man. I wish they too

were in the ship, that they might learn of what avail our free will is in the midst of dangers and afflictions.

The apostles are an example of this in our text. However weak their faith may have been, had it not been for this faith, they would have had to despair in spite of all their free will, and the sea would have devoured them. But they have a remedy in their faith,, little as it was, as Christ Himself declares: “O ye of little faith;” they despair not, but hasten to arouse Christ and to obtain His help. If little faith can accomplish this, what ought not a strong faith to perform? The example of the leper and of the centurion in our last sermon tells us. Hence we say: The free will of man, and his natural ability, are naught; they do not stand, the test nor are they prepared for the storms and battles of life. All that we, from our own resources, can do for ourselves, in such times of trial, is to cry aloud for help, and to wish ourselves a hundred miles away. Our free will cannot comfort the heart, but makes it more and more disconsolate and tremulous, so that every falling leaf will terrify it.

Faith, however, though but little, will not turn away, nor will it be affrighted, as we see in the example of the disciples. Instant death threatened them; the billows were hurled with might from every side against the little boat until it was covered with water. Who would not tremble in such danger and in the presence of death? But faith, no matter how weak it may be, dares to withstand danger, as formerly little David withstood Goliath, nor does it fear sin or death, for it seeks help where it can be found; it comes to Christ and appeals to Him with the earnest cry: “Lord, save up: we perish.”

Faith begets a sure hope of help, though destruction is imminent; it speaks with the psalmist: “I believed, therefore have I spoken,” One thing is sure: No one can pray unless he has faith. Man’s free will cannot do it, since it sees but the present danger and misery; but Him who can rescue from dagger and death it does not see, so that man with his free will, and on account of it, must die in his sins. Faith, however small and weak, trusts in Christ and obtains help from Him.

If the faith of the disciples had been strong and firm like that of the prophet Jonah, who was in the whale’s belly until, the third day, they would have said to the sea and waves: Beat against us as you may, your forces are

not strong enough to overthrow our boat, for Christ our Lord is on board with us; and even if you succeed, an arch of refuge will arise above us in the middle of the sea, whereon we can sit secure from drowning. We have a God who is able to protect us, not only upon the sea, but also beneath its waters.

Faith deals not merely with what is visible and present, as does the free will; hence it does not tremble nor despond, but looks forward to something better. He who has faith takes courage, even in the very jaws of death; he clings to the comfort that there must be some escape, as did the disciples, though of little faith. Faith is therefore no small matter, nor a common art; it is a divine power which does not originate in our free will, but is produced in us by the Holy Ghost through the Word of God.

Of this our opponents, the Papists have no knowledge, else they would not so violently attack us when we preach: Faith alone justifies; that is, faith alone finds consolation when sin, death, and hell threaten to destroy us. No wonder that they are bold and proud as long as the sea is calm and the weather fair, but discouraged and hopeless as soon as the storm arises and adversities come. They have no faith – nothing but their weak, comfortless, free will, which forgets God and His Word, and is utterly helpless.

The peculiar misfortune in the incident of our Gospel, as it seemed, was that Christ, in the midst of the imminent danger, was in a deep, quiet sleep, caused perhaps by weariness from the labors of the day during which He had preached much, or by passing the night in prayer and in enduring affliction. For I think our Lord was much troubled during the night by the vexations of the devil, as He laments in the 89. Psalm: *Pauper sum ego, et in laboribus a juventute mea*. “I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer Thy terrors I am distracted.” Hence He was but seldom glad, being weighed down with burdensome thoughts, and full of lamentation and sorrow, as we read in the same Psalm: “For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave.” Nevertheless this sleep of Christ, real and natural as it was, had to serve, as did all His actions, to awaken faith in His disciples.

Christ still pursues this course towards His people; it seems, oftentimes, as though He had forgotten them entirely, just as He there, calmly and quietly sleeping in the boat, was unmindful of the storm and cared not for

the disciples or the ship. But He is with them in the ship, although He sleepeth.

Our Lord permits tribulations to dash against us, as upon the sea He permitted the waves to fall upon the ship. He suffers the world and the devil to rage against the Christians, so that it seems, as it does in our times, as if all were lost. The pope and his rabble oppose with great enmity the Gospel; he stirs up the mighty potentates against us. The devil, on the other hand, sets the infidels upon us. Thus we sit in our ship with sea and wind unfavorable, while the Lord shows no signs of help; He sleeps in the ship. We must, however, arouse ourselves and take courage in the belief that we are not lost, for the Lord is with us in the boat. If He seems to know us not, let us not seem as though we knew Him not, but let us firmly adhere to the faith that He can calm the sea, no matter how it tosses and rages.

The same faith we should apply in *privatis tentationibus*, in our own private dangers and afflictions. When the devil comes and holds before our eyes our sins, and threatens us with the wrath of God and eternal condemnation, then let us say with faith in Christ: Our Lord is not far from us, but He sleeps. Therefore we must repair to Him in earnest prayer and awaken Him, as the disciples, do. These deem their safety more urgent than the slumber of the Lord, and think: Surely, we must have Christ awake or else we perish; hence they come and cease not with their cry, until they have, aroused Him from His sleep. Let us learn to do* likewise. If we enter the ship with Christ, tempests will arise, and He will be asleep, that we may deeply feel the burden of trial. Otherwise, if He would not sleep and would immediately calm the storm, we would never know what a true Christian is, and might even think that we were successful by our own skill. Trials, on the other hand, strengthen faith, so that we must confess: No human power could have helped us here; God and His Word alone could do it.

In the occurrence in our Gospel we find not only these beautiful and comfortable lessons, but we also see Christ as a real, natural man, who has body and soul, and who is in need of food and drink, of sleep and other requirements of our nature, so far as they are free from sin. Thus we see how Christ is like unto us, and that we must not commit the error of the Manicheans, who regard Him as a Spirit merely, and not as a real, true man.

But while the natural sleep of Jesus is a sure sign of His real, human nature, He at the same time proves Himself also the true omnipotent God, inasmuch as He with one word calms the wind and the sea. This was a mightier deed than man could do. To quiet the tempest with a word requires divine power.

Hence we ought to dwell upon this occurrence with delight, since it exhibits to us Christ as true God and true man in one person. Wherefore He is able to help us in every distress and danger, if we but come to Him for assistance. If we must now and then suffer something, what matters it? The wicked must also endure misery and sorrow, and have yet, in addition, an accusing conscience, while in the end eternal damnation awaits them.

Finally, the third lesson teaches us the fruit of such faith. Others also who witness this wonderful deed are astonished, become converted and exclaim: "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!" These same persons had thus far, perhaps, regarded Christ merely as a human being, and did not know nor believe that He could rescue from death, and that men should seek to obtain help from Him. Now they learn to comprehend that He is the mightiest and best Helper, affording aid where all human help fails.

Thus it will always be: The greater and the heavier afflictions are, the greater will also be their fruits and benefits. The world now persecutes us most violently so that we often think that all is lost, that the waves and the tempest will surely overwhelm and destroy us. But let us not despair; let us firmly adhere to the Word and faith. We may be assured that a glorious and happy result will follow, at which we will rejoice and be glad. The bitter hatred of the pope and the Turk against the Church causes us pain and anguish like that of a woman in travail, but even this will, under God, be productive of good to us. So we as individuals, when we are afflicted, ought ever to be assured that such visitations have their benefits.

Thus it is apparent that this Gospel is full of consolation and rich instruction. We are taught as Christians to begin our journey in life with Jesus, and to be prepared to meet with Him the tempests and the threatening billows. When adversity is upon us, we must in faith hold fast to His Word, convinced that at the proper time we shall be rescued from danger and tribulation, yea, that we shall even derive some benefit from it. Hence we

should rather wish to encounter this trial, that we may learn by our own experience what force there is in the Word and in faith. Who then would desire to escape the cross, when such a certain help and reward is at hand? True, our old Adam is much displeased with such trials; they are bitter to him, and he would much rather avoid them; hence it is necessary to study such examples often and well, to read and to hear the Word of God diligently, so that when difficulties and tribulations come, we may be ready to meet them. May we then with earnest prayer seek help and safety of Christ, who is with us on the voyage, though He may sleep and seem to have forgotten us.

May our Heavenly Father, for Christ's sake, grant us this through His Holy Spirit. Amen.

Fifth Sunday After Epiphany.

Matt. 13:24-30.

Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.

This Gospel is apparently plain and easy to be understood, for the Lord Himself tells us what is meant by the field, by the good seed and by the tares. Nevertheless the learned do not agree in the explanation of this parable, wherefore it is of great importance to ascertain its true meaning.

Some interpret the tares as heresies, and conclude from this Gospel that secular governments have no right to punish heretics, since we read here that they are not to be rooted out. Augustine himself confesses to have held this view, until he was forced by examples and irrefutable arguments to recede from this opinion. Some again make no distinction between secular authorities and the servants of this householder, and come to the conclusion, by interpreting the tares to mean public offenses, that Christian governments ought not to execute capital punishment. Others again, such as the pope and his tribe, regardless of the fact that the Lord forbids the

rooting out of the tares, are not satisfied therewith, but since they hold the doctrine of the holy Gospel to be tares and condemn it, fume and rage against it with murder and all manner of cruel tyranny.

Since there are so many interpretations we will first endeavor to find the correct one, and then we will express our opinion in regard to the question, what ought to be done with the heretics.

Christ does not speak here especially of the heretics, but represents in this parable the kingdom of God, that is, the entire Christian Church as she now is upon earth, and as she will remain until the end of time. The Christian Church is as a field planted with good seed, but during the night comes the devil and secretly sows the tares. Hence the good seed and the tares will ever grow together in the Church; the good and the evil will intermingle; nor can this be prevented in this world. In the future world it will be otherwise; then will the good be separated from the wicked; for the Lord says, that at the harvest time His servants, the reapers, will perform this task according to His commands.

We see therefore how this Gospel condemns the Donatists, Novatians, Anabaptists, and other heretics, who zealously endeavored to establish a church free from all blemishes and composed of perfect saints. If therefore any Christian happened, through weakness, to commit some wrong, they excommunicated him on the spot, and considered him no longer as a brother. This procedure was in direct conflict with the demands of Christ, who desires that the sinner should be brought to repentance, and that to this end the ministers of the Church should seek, with all care and diligence, to assist the people to mend their ways and to repent of their sins.

In evidence of this we have many examples. David was guilty of a great and horrible crime, but when he repented and asked for a pardon he obtained forgiveness. Peter also fell deeply into sin, but is restored to grace, because he acknowledged his wrong and asked for mercy with many burning tears. Shortly before his fall the Lord told him: "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not, etc.;" and Matt. 18, when Peter asked whether it would be enough seven times to forgive his brother who sinned against him, Christ answered: "I say not unto thee until seven times: but, until seventy times seven."

These instances show plainly how the Christians upon earth will not be so perfect as not occasionally to waver and to fall. Whoever then attempts to organize a church in which there shall be no sin nor weakness, must condemn and excommunicate all such feeble Christians, and even the strong, since there is none who will not sometimes err.

The Christian Church contains not only hypocrites, and such as are Christians only in name, but also true Christians who are yet weak and who have to combat continually the old Adam within them, by whom they are sometimes brought to a fall. If it were not thus the Christians would have no need of these petitions in the Lord's Prayer, which they must daily pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us;" and again: "Lead us not into temptation." This last petition clearly shows that even believing Christians can at all times fall into temptation. If we would expel all such, and refuse to acknowledge them as Christians, we would soon have no Christian Church at all, and would have to look in vain for Christians.

But this is not the proper course to pursue. True Christians, as we have stated, are yet liable to be weak and fail in manifold ways; but through repentance and faith in Christ they arise again from their sins when they have fallen. Among such Christians who, though yet in weakness, are the good seed, we find the baneful tares, the false Christians, who pride themselves in the name and boast of being the good ground. We have to permit and suffer this, since we know that the tares cannot be gathered up, nor can the Church be entirely cleansed of them.

Christ furthermore teaches us whence these tares come, and why it is that in the Church, where the good seed is sown, where the Word of God is preached in its purity, there are nevertheless so many tares, so many hypocrites and false Christians. This is taught us that we might be cautioned against the offense which the world takes on this account, so that it even declares: The preaching of the Gospel produces no good, etc. We must be careful to avoid all such wrong and wicked thoughts in which the world indulges.

God be praised that we have again the pure Gospel, and that we are prepared to prove to our adversaries that their doctrine is false and unfounded! Yet there are among us also tares in plenty, so that much offense

is given; avarice, usury, lasciviousness, reveling, profane swearing, lying and cheating predominate even more than formerly under the pope. Such scandalous conduct causes the Gospel and its ministers many aspersions, and it is a common saying: People would be better without this doctrine.

In the parable Christ exculpates both the doctrine and its teachers when He says, that in the congregation, which has the pure doctrine and which is the good field, there are also many tares and lawless fellows. The doctrine is not to blame for this, for that is pure and effective; nor is it the fault of the preachers, who would surely much prefer to have the people more virtuous and pious, and who labor earnestly to this end; but the enemy, the devil, is the mischief-maker; he, as a malicious neighbor might do, goes forth by night, when others unsuspectingly sleep, and sows the tares amidst the wheat. He takes possession of the hearts so that they do not heed the Word, becoming more and more estranged from it day by day, being led or driven by the devil, according to his own pleasure, from sin to sin and from shame to shame.

It is then a hellish falsehood, and a horrible blasphemy, to accuse Christ and His Gospel of producing this demoralization, when in fact the devil is the sole cause of it! And yet, such blasphemy is prevalent today throughout the world. No matter what misfortune may visit the land, men will denounce the Gospel, the pure doctrine and the good seed, as if these had caused it all. And yet every one must know that the good seed, from its very nature, can produce nothing but good fruit; where this is not the result the blame must be attached to the bad ground, to the sterile and accursed soil.

Let therefore every Christian, particularly every minister of the Gospel, learn from this parable to desist from the vain endeavor to have the Church composed of perfect saints. The devil prevents this by scattering his seed over the field; and he does this so clandestinely that it is not observed until the blades spring forth and grow. The apostles Paul, John and others experienced this; when they thought they had about them pious Christians and faithful co-laborers in the Gospel, they often found them to be its most violent and dangerous enemies, and consummate hypocrites. Our experience is the same; many whom we judged to be pious and honest, while we feel secure and expect no misfortune, do us the greatest harm and give the most offense.

Our only consolation under such circumstances is the declaration of Christ that it would happen thus. St. John consoles himself, in his epistle, on account of such evils when he says: "They went out from us, but they were not of us." It frequently happens that what is expected to terminate most favorably, results most disastrously. Angels often turn into devils. One of the apostles betrayed Christ. Christians become heretics. The people of God degenerated into a set of villains who nailed Christ to the cross. Thus it happens and not otherwise. If we therefore see the tares springing up among the wheat, we must not be dismayed nor relinquish our office, but must steadily labor on, admonishing the people also not to be offended. The tares will and can grow, not only in a wretched soil, but also amidst the wheat upon a fertile field.

The devil, as the Gospel tells us, is not content with desert and sterile places, but longs to rule in heaven. He is a gourmand and loves to eat choice morsels in comely places; he intrudes his filthy presence in clean places, and thinks his stench sweet as musk and balsam. He would dwell among the roses, that is, he desires to be in the Church, and there to rule. This we cannot prevent, and it must be endured until that day when all will be changed.

Though it pains severely to be compelled to endure the wicked, and even to suffer at their hands, yet we may console ourselves with the knowledge that we are not to blame for this. Nor will God permit it to harm us; if we but firmly adhere to the Word, eternal blessings will be the result. The wicked, on the contrary, who cause all this offense, and who refuse to live as Christians, will find their punishment in this world and in eternity, as the Lord declares: "All they that do iniquity shall be cast into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." This issue should be kept in mind by the true Christians, and the offense which they cannot prevent ought not to disconcert them. If the multitude will persist in wrong-doing, so let it be. We will thank God that there are some who accept and obey His Word and amend their lives.

This then is the sum and substance of the Gospel today. Even among the true Christians where there is the good seed, the Word of God, in a good and fruitful field, there will always be wicked men and unbelievers, nor should any one presume to change this state of affairs. For Christ says that

the evil shall remain intermixed with the good until the last day, when the angels will bring about the separation, which we mortals must not attempt. If we would undertake this task we would only make bad worse, inasmuch as we would be very apt to root out, or to trample under foot, the good wheat with the tares.

Two questions now arise. First: Ought the Church to exercise her authority and exclude from her pale such persons as are guilty of public offense? Secondly: Ought secular governments to suppress heresies by force?

The answer to the first question must be: This Gospel does not deprive the Church of her right to excommunicate evil-doers, for the Lord speaks here of a rooting out by force, with the sword, where the transgressors are deprived of life. The Church, however, and the office of the ministry do not wield the sword, but what they do is done through the Word alone. If, therefore, sinners are excommunicated, or put under discipline, they are received again into the Church as soon as they repent and ask for the forgiveness of their sins. The ancient church-fathers rightly remark in this connection: If Matthew, while he was yet a publican, or Paul, while he was a persecutor of the Christians, or the thief upon the cross, had been condemned and executed soon after their nefarious deeds were done, surely the good seed, which after their conversion manifested itself in them, would also have been rooted out. It is not the province of the Church to visit capital punishment upon offenders. Her office is to exclude the impenitent, that they may be brought to a knowledge of their sin and be converted, and also that they may be an example, warning them to be cautious and to guard against sin.

Perhaps you will say: Why then do we hand over to the executioner robbers, murderers and other malefactors? Would it not be enough to excommunicate them? Might not thus many a one be saved who now dies in his sins? We answer: Mark well that the Lord speaks here of the kingdom of God. In this kingdom the sword shall not prevail, lest the good seed be torn up with the tares. To the governments of this world, however, God did entrust the sword and gave the command: "Whosoever taketh the sword shall perish by the sword." Christ does not here speak of this secular government, hence we must not confound its functions with the duties to be performed in the kingdom of God; in both, however, we must let matters

take their proper course. Still, it is the duty of our temporal governments to see to it that the condemned malefactors receive appropriate spiritual advice and consolation, in order that while the body suffers its penalty the spirit may be saved, until the former, which is here executed in shame, shall also in the life to come arise in glory.

From this we can deduce an answer to the query whether civil governments ought to suppress heresies with the sword, since Christ commands not to weed out the tares, but to let them grow until the day of judgment. Our Gospel asserts only this, that the servants of the man who sowed the good seed shall not root up the tares. Now these servants, as has been stated, belong to the kingdom of God, and not to the kingdoms of this world, and it is not their office to wield the sword, for God did not give it to them. If they do resort to force, as did the pope, they will only do mischief and nothing good whatever. But to the civil government the sword is committed, with the command to suppress all offenses, that they may not spread and do harm. Now there is surely no more pernicious and hideous offense than that which is caused by the prevalence of false doctrine and improper worship. Hence every Christian government ought to guard most diligently against such offenses, since these are always accompanied by seditions and all manner of evils and calamities, as the history of the world clearly exhibits.

We are therefore of the opinion that St. Augustine was right in his remarks *ad Vincentium: Serviant reges Christo, leges ferendo pro Christo*, kings should serve the Lord by framing laws to the promotion of His honor: and *ad Parmenionem: Non dormiat severitas disciplinae, quando crimen cujusque notum, et omnibus execrabile apparet*, that is, severe penalty must be applied when the crime becomes manifest and is seen by all in its detestable character. He further remarks that the crime ought always to be perfectly manifest, that the application of the punishment might not be hasty, but follow only upon a careful investigation of all the attending circumstances. For it might easily occur that something might at first be regarded as a heresy, which, however, after a careful investigation with the Word of God in hand, proves itself to be the pure truth. The Papists are therefore execrable, shameful tyrants, whom no one can induce to enter into a conversation or debate, but who simply continue to slay and to practice all kinds of oppression. The judgment must precede the punishment; but if any

one desires to judge a heresy, he must derive this judgment from the Scriptures, and from no other source.

We therefore conclude that the civil government, as soon as it discovers abominable heresies by which the glory of Christ is diminished and the salvation of souls prevented, is in duty bound, yea that it has the office, to wield the sword and to exercise its full authority against those errors which bring divisions among the people and other great calamities, as we have experienced more than once. And if the teachers of false doctrines will not be convinced of their error, nor desist from their preaching, let the government use its power and compel them to refrain from their mischievous work, so that the true doctrine, and the proper worship of God, may be retained pure and unadulterated, that peace and harmony may prevail. Thus both powers must assist each other to keep the people united in the pure faith and to ward off every offense and shame; this will be done if the authorities of the Church use the Word and discipline, while the government of the State cooperates with the sword. If matters are conducted thus, God will grant His blessing upon both governments. Those wicked persons, however, who care naught for the Word, and who escape the punishment due them from the government of the State, will hear their sentence on the day of judgment. May God in mercy protect us from such an end, and keep us faithful in His Word until our life is past and we are saved in heaven! Amen.

Septuagesima. Matt. 20:1-16.

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them: Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

This Gospel is intricate, and very difficult for the young and the simple; but since it is set apart for this Sunday, we will say a few words concerning it.

You hear from this parable how the householder goes out early in the morning and hires laborers into his vineyard, who labor there twelve hours. Afterwards he hires others who labor but nine hours; then again some who labor six, and some but three hours; finally he hires those who perform merely one hour's labor. The work done by these laborers is evidently very unequal, and yet they have all the same regard. The householder had entered into no agreement as to the wages, except with the first, and now when pay time comes he gives to the last, who labored but one hour, exactly as much as to the first, with whom he had agreed upon a penny a day. This transaction meets with severe condemnation before the world, where labor and wages are fixed by definite rules, he who labors much receiving greater pay than he who works but little. And this is right; it must be thus. Nevertheless it would be very unbecoming if a laborer, who had agreed with his employer to work for a certain stipulated price, would undertake to find fault with his master because he, from mere charity, bestows gifts upon others. We of course admit that it is not right to pay equal wages where the labor is unequal.

Christ employs this parable to teach us the difference between His kingdom and the kingdom of this world. Affairs in the former differ entirely from those in the latter, in which there is an inequality among persons. Our Gospel has nothing to do with this existing inequality in the world, where the master has many possessions and the servant who labors for him none, or but few; the parable simply refers to the kingdom of God, and teaches us that in it all inequality is abolished, that everything is common property there, and that one shall have as much, and be esteemed as much, as the other. In our daily life, however, there will always be a marked distinction among men on account of their various pursuits. The peasant will have a mode of life different from that of the citizen, and the prince from that of the nobleman. In these matters there is inequality everywhere, and so it must remain. But in the kingdom of Christ it is otherwise; there is no distinction there among believers; they are all alike, whether they be kings, princes, governors, masters or servants. All have the same Baptism, Gospel, Faith, Sacrament, the same Christ and God. They all attend divine worship in perfect equality; the servant, the mechanic and the peasant hear the same Word as the mightiest lord. The Baptism wherewith I was baptized belongs to every other child, whether rich or poor. Magdalene and the malefactor on the cross have the same faith which St. Peter and St. Paul had; yea, the

selfsame faith which you or I have, if we are Christians. All sinners, if converted, have the same God and Christ whom John the Baptist had. There is no difference here, though one may by far excel the other in his station in life, in his calling, or in his talents.

The comfortable knowledge that we Christians are all alike in Christ, is to be obtained first of all from our Gospel today. In our earthly relations a distinction must remain; the father will be above the son, the master above the servant, the king and ruler above his subjects. This is according to God's arrangement, who ordained the various offices and callings among men. If we would undertake to introduce innovations in this regard, so that the man-servant would be on an equality with his master, or that the maid should have equal authority with her mistress, or the citizen as much as the rulers, we would surely have a sorry time of it, as we experienced during the rebellious days of the peasant-war in Germany.

Whatever the diversities of position in this world may be, we will not be troubled thereby if we remember that for all, whether they be of high or of low degree, there is but one Christ, one Baptism, one Gospel and one Spirit. No one can claim a better Christ, Baptism or Gospel than belongs to the most humble servant. Others may have more money, possessions, or other gifts than we, but they have no other or better God.

This should be well known and remembered, so that every one might be content with his calling and ready to serve God in it. Let each one say: Though I am no emperor, nor a king, though I own no cities nor castles, as do the princes, still I have with them the same Baptism, the same Christ, who died for me and achieved salvation for me. These magnificent gifts which we possess in Christ should make us so well satisfied that we scorn all earthly glory and derive our courage and comfort solely from the fact that we are baptized in the name of Jesus, that He died for us and ascended into heaven, where He sitteth at the right hand of God as our Mediator, and as our Savior from sin, death and all evil.

Whoever is aware of this, and believes that we are all one in Christ, will gladly perform his labor, whatever it may be, and will not be annoyed by the inferior position which, for this short life, may perchance be his destiny. For thus it is in the present world; various will be the positions of men; the one will have much, the other but little; one will be the master while the

other is the servant. This state of affairs will not disturb the Christian; he knows that it is God's will, and can calmly exclaim: Though my duties are heavier than those of others, though I have no authority over others, yet I will not complain, but remain cheerfully in my position until it pleases God to elevate me to another. Meanwhile my consolation shall be that neither emperors nor kings have another Christ, or more of Him, than I have. If these would have more, they cannot be of this kingdom, for in it full parity exists, inasmuch as we all can come unto God and be pleasing unto Him only in Christ Jesus, who suffered for us and achieved salvation with His blood for one and all. This treasure is mine entirely; why therefore should I be distressed on account of any temporal privation, when in spiritual things I am thus equal to the saints?

This assurance that there is no inequality in the kingdom of Christ is our comfort and reliance, so that every Christian can with alacrity perform his respective duties in whatever station of life he may be placed. Contentment will surely crown a Christian's life, if he with conscious satisfaction exclaims: Why should I complain of my condition in life, it is good and pleasing in the sight of God! Though the sphere of my labors is lowly and arduous, it matters not; if royal honors fall not to my lot, I take the Christian's rank and that is more; yea, what dignity more exalted could I desire or expect!

Those hired first manifest no such disposition; they murmur and complain because their wages are not higher than those of the others. Just so do our priests. They demand of God that He should reward them according to their works, and imagine that they have performed much more than others, so that their seat in heaven ought to be above the rest; they want a greater and a better Christ. They openly taught that if a priest reads the mass at the altar he performs a precious and holy work, the merits of which he can transfer to others, helping them to heaven thereby; and that, consequently, the rank of the priest is by far higher and better in the kingdom of Christ than that of the laity. Hence they murmur against the equality in the kingdom of Christ, and would fain produce therein the same inequality which prevails in the world.

Furthermore they taught that a virgin in a convent is much better in regard to her faith, than a married woman; and they still condemn those who teach otherwise as heretics. In this they resemble the first in our

Gospel, who murmur and claim to be better and to have earned more than others. They recount before the Lord their God how long they have labored and how difficult their work has been. But He answers them: In your earthly labors there may have existed diversities among you; some may have worked longer and more diligently than others, but not one of you has a better Baptism or a better Christ than the other, and you all hear the same Gospel preached.

When monks and nuns declare married people to possess only the common Gospel and Ten Commandments, while they enjoy the higher Gospel and do much more than those in the ordinary station of life are required to do, they lie most infamously and renounce the Gospel. With such assertions they attempt to establish a diversity of rank in the realm of the Gospel, where Christ has ordained perfect equality, as our text today clearly teaches; for from it we learn that in the kingdom of God one is worth just as much as the other. If a virgin has the inclination and chooses to remain in her virginity, it is right enough that she should do so, and no one will object, but it is foolish to boast of it and to think that such a condition in life makes her better before God than others are. Because we condemn this offensive and foolish notion the pope accuses us of forbidding good works. But in this he slanders us; we do not forbid good works; but this we say, that all are alike in the kingdom of Christ, for there God deals with us all not according to our merits, but solely in grace and mercy for the sake of Jesus Christ, His Son.

If we share in this equality in Christ through faith, then it matters not what we are otherwise, and whatever our duties may be, we ought to perform them gladly and zealously: whether we are teachers or preachers, masters or mistresses, man-servants or maid-servants, it is all the same; for in Christ we are one. The world takes great offense at this, and the Jews become well nigh frantic when they hear that we, who were heathens, shall also be saved as well as they, though we are uncircumcised and do not keep the Sabbath, nor carry other burdens of the law, under which they sigh and sweat. Christ refers to this in the parable when He says: “But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more, and they likewise received every man a penny” – the first as well as those who had labored but one hour.

The Lord of the vineyard does not know of any distinction. He says: "Friend, I do thee no wrong; take that thine is, and go thy way;" that is to say: You have received your reward in times gone by, viz. the land of Canaan; now I will establish a new kingdom, in which perfect equality shall reign. The vineyard is mine, so that I can do with it what I please, and it is not your concern how I deal with my servants.

The Jews begrudge us the life eternal, and will have nothing in common with the Gentiles; they even accuse God our Lord of wrong-doing, who has to tell them: The land is mine, not yours; it is therefore not your business how I arrange it. The pope and his followers act like the Jews; they are also opposed to this equality in the kingdom of God, and insist upon especial privileges before they will enter; but these they will not get. It behooves us, therefore to make a clear distinction between the affairs of the world and those of the kingdom of Christ. In the latter there is no difference in rank, since we all have but one God, one Christ, one Holy Ghost, one Gospel, one Baptism, one Sacrament and one Faith. In this respect, one is as good, as pious and as holy, as the other.

For these gifts we ought to thank God with all our heart; and we should use them properly, so that we can exclaim: Regard me as you please, think much of me or little, I will still be glad; for I have as much as emperors and kings, yea, as much as the saints and angels in heaven have. How so? Through Christ! Therefore, according to the will of God, I will ply with a joyous heart, with energy and love, my task, and will do right gladly what my calling demands of me, be I father or mother, master or servant; this will I do since I have such a glorious treasure in Christ.

The Gospel today thus instructs us that there is, and ever will be, an inequality upon earth in regard to the persons of men. A prince is a different person from a preacher, a maid-servant from her mistress, a school-teacher different from a mayor, and hence there will be various customs and modes of living, which will ever remain. In Christ's kingdom however another rule prevails: the one shall receive as much as the other; for salvation, redemption from death and sin, are no merits of men, nor are they due to them, but they are free gifts of grace to all who earnestly seek them. Such mercy of God we ought to recognize with a joyful heart, and not complain nor murmur on account of its universality, as do the false saints, who claim eternal life as a well-deserved reward and not as a free gift of grace. Let us

praise God for this equality in His kingdom, and from it derive such consolation that we can easily endure all outward diversities of rank and station in life.

From the last words of our Gospel: “For many be called, but few chosen,” foolish and wicked thoughts have been drawn by idle fellows, who say the meaning of this sentence is that God has chosen some unto salvation, and these will be saved without a doubt, while on the other hand those who are not thus chosen will be damned, no matter how piously or how faithfully they may live; for it is the will of God that such shall fall and not be saved. Hence they conclude that it is a matter of indifference how they live; for if I am to be saved, it will take place without my concern about it, and if I am not to be saved, all my concern about it will avail nothing. What reckless, secure people such ungodly thoughts will produce every one can judge.

When we considered the Gospel for Epiphany, and pondered the saying of the prophet Micah, we learned that all such thoughts as imprudently meddle with the incomprehensible providence of God are of the devil, and that it behooves us to pursue another method of contemplation in regard to the will of God. For such thoughts are sure to bring man into despair, or to render him reckless and regardless of consequences.

The proper course to know the will of God aright, and to avoid offense in this regard, is to trust implicitly in Christ, as He Himself declares: “No man cometh to the Father but by me.” Whoever wishes to know the Father and to come unto Him, must first come unto Christ and learn to know Him as the Son of God, as the omnipotent, eternal God. And what did the Son of God achieve? He becomes man for us; He submits Himself to the law to free us from the law; He is crucified and dies upon the cross to pay the ransom for our sins; He arises from the dead to open for us through His resurrection the entrance into heaven, and to defend us against everlasting death; He sitteth at the right hand of God as our Mediator, and through His Holy Spirit He rules and guides His people and protects them against the wiles and persecutions of the devil. To know Christ thus is to know Him aright.

If this knowledge is fully and firmly fixed in your heart, then look towards heaven and meditate upon this subject thus: If the Son of God has

performed all this for us at the command and according to the will of the Father, what then must be the disposition of God towards us? Surely, your own heart will constrain you to exclaim: God loves us, for He even gave His only Son unto us and for us. He desires not our death, for He employs the noblest and most precious remedy to give us life. In this way we are truly brought to God, as Christ says, John 3: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Compare these truths with the above mentioned thoughts, and you will discover that the latter come from the devil, and that they must cause offense, either hurling men into hopeless despair, or making them reckless; for they can hope nothing good from God.

A few, again, interpret these words: "Many be called but few chosen," to mean that God offers His grace unto many, but permits only few to accept it. Such an explanation is viciously wrong, for it follows from it, as a necessary consequence, that God is to be blamed if we are not all saved; and to believe this would be utter and satanic blasphemy, as every one can see who will but look at Christ as the Son of God and our Savior.

This expression, "Many be called," etc. must therefore be understood in a far different sense. The Gospel is preached publicly, and universally, unto all who wish to hear and to accept it; yea, God has it thus proclaimed, so that every one can hear and believe it and be saved. But what is the result? It is as the Gospel states, that "few are chosen," because there are but few who so receive the Gospel that God can be pleased with them. Some hear it, but heed it not; others hear it and at first accept it, but do not retain it in times of adversity; others again hear it, but value it less than money and worldly pleasures. This is not pleasing to God, nor does He delight in such people. This Christ calls not being chosen; that is, not conducting themselves so that God could have pleasure in them. The chosen ones of God are those who love to hear His Gospel, who believe in Christ and manifest their faith by good works, being prepared to suffer for it if need be.

This is the true sense of the words, and this will not offend people, but cause them to amend, so that they will think: If I am to please God and be among the chosen ones, it will not do for me to live with a bad conscience, to sin against the commandments of God, and not to resist sin; but I must hear the Word preached, pray for the Holy Spirit, not suffer the Word to be

removed from the heart, contend against Satan and his suggestions, and pray for protection, patience, and assistance. This will make good Christians. On the other hand, those who think that God does not wish all to have salvation, either fall into despair or become reckless, ungodly people who live like brutes, thinking: If it is ordained beforehand whether I shall be saved or not, why should I put myself to any inconvenience about it? No, this is wrong; we have the command to hear the Word of God and to believe that Christ is our Savior, who has paid the ransom for our sins, Remember that command and obey it. Should your faith fail or you prove weak, pray God for His Holy Spirit, and do not doubt that Christ is your Savior, and you shall be saved through Him, if you believe in Him, that is, comfort yourself with His merits. May Christ Jesus, our dear Lord, grant this to all of us. Amen.

Sexagesima. Luke 8:4-15.

And when much people were gathered together, and were come to Him out of every city, He spake by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way-side: and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit a hundred-fold. And when He had said these things, He cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And His disciples asked Him, saying, What might this parable be? And He said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing, they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the Word of God. Those by the way-side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the Word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the Word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

My Beloved: You learn from this Gospel that there are many kinds of hearers of the pure Word of God, but only a few who retain it and bring forth good fruit. This must be diligently presented to the people, so that all may examine themselves and discover to what class of hearers they belong, and make haste to be numbered among those who are called the good ground, in whom the Word brings forth fruit.

The first class of hearers are those with whom the Word fares as “the seed by the way-side.” It does not yield fruit because it is either trodden down or devoured by the fowls of the air. The second class are they “who hear and receive the Word with joy.” They not only speak of it but believe in it, and it grows finely, as the seed upon a rocky soil, but when the first hot day of summer comes it begins to wither, because it has neither root nor moisture. When persecution and tribulation come, such people fall away before the good fruit of faith with patience follows. The third class are easily discernible. They are Christians who are as seed among thorns; it grows, but brings no fruit and is choked; the thorns grow too densely around it. The fourth class of hearers, finally, are they who faithfully receive and retain the Word in an honest and good heart until it brings forth fruit with patience. They do not endeavor to avoid persecution for the sake of the Word, are ready in faith and love towards God, to endure all that may happen, and bring forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, and some thirty-fold.

These are the four classes of hearers. Now let each one examine his own heart, and see to which class he belongs. The first three are of no account; the worst of all are the first, who hear the Word, but are immediately robbed of it by the devil, so that they do not believe, unto salvation. Mark this well.

I would not have ventured to presume the hearts which hear the Word, but heed it not and forget it, to be possessed of the devil. We regard the heedless hearing of the Word of God as of no especial danger. Those who act thus we suppose to be simple, inattentive persons, with whom it is natural to hear and then forget the Gospel. But Christ judges differently in our text. He says:

“The devil taketh away the Word out of their hearts.”

This tells us plainly what we must think of persons, of children and domestics, who hear the preaching of the Word with inattention, and then go on their way as though they had never heard it, with no inclination to think of it. All such can not say that the Holy Ghost is their guide; for the devil is so near them that he reaches into their hearts and plucks out the Word. From this other evil habits must result; they become disobedient, dishonest, stubborn, selfish, proud and vindictive; whereas if they would

retain the Word in their hearts and ponder it with care, they would become well-behaved, obedient, diligent, honest, humble and tractable people.

These are the first and most reckless class, and the Lord is very wroth at their depravity, so that He pronounces a severer judgment upon them than upon others. He says: The devils, who dwell in the air, take the Word from their hearts, so that they disregard it and think themselves beyond all danger, even if they let the preaching of the Word enter into one ear and escape by the other. But listen to what imminent danger you expose yourselves by such conduct. Christ, whose judgment is reliable, says: "The devil doeth this."

Wherever you meet any one who permits himself to be talked to and preached to as though he were a log, as our stingy city-folks and farmers do, and as is the case especially with our opponents, the Papists, you may at once conclude that the devil has his nest there, and tears out from the hearts the Word of God, the good seed, so that all preaching and singing and admonition has as little effect upon them as a stroke with a rod has upon the water; they believe not, nor will they be saved. This is the devil's work; for if this forgetfulness were merely natural and innate, as some persons are more docile than others, there would at least be a desire to learn, which would cause one to exclaim:

God, why am I so stupid! Give me grace, and enable my heart to be attentive and to retain what I hear in church! The devil finds no room nor abode with those persons who have an earnest longing for the Word and who exert themselves to keep it, else they would not have such a desire. But the former care not for the Word, and deem it a great loss if they must miss the earning of a dime, or of a penny, on account of attending church and hearing a sermon. You may depend upon it, such persons are under the devil's thumb.

This class of hearers, who have the Word but heed it not, since the devil plucks it from their hearts, is by far the most numerous.

The following two classes are not quite so bad. They are weak and faltering; they do not object to the Word and begin to believe; therefore the Lord does not give them over to the devil, as He did the first, although they are also deficient in bringing forth fruit. They are those who in time of temptation do not resist nor persevere, but fall away as the wormy fruit falls

in heaps from the tree in stormy weather. "For a while they believe," says the Lord, but when troubles come they are frightened, and not resolved nor ready to endure suffering. The fruit of life everlasting will not be theirs, nor any other good fruits which come from the Word and from faith.

The third class consists of those who neglect the Word on account of avarice, cares and pleasures of this life. Whoever indulges in the cares of this world, and thinks of nothing else but how, by toiling and moiling, to become rich, burdens his heart, as Christ says, Luke 21, so that the good fruit is choked, as is the seed among the thorns. To labor is right, and every one ought to be busy and industrious in his calling. This is not forbidden, but rather commended when God tells us, Gen. 3: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," etc. But the sordid and niggardly drudgery, in which the world now engages for the purpose of augmenting the heap of dollars and cents, so as to become rich and honored, chokes the Word of God in many a heart, so that it cannot grow nor bring forth fruit. These temporal concerns fill the heart, and to them it cleaves to the exclusion of everything else.

With these three classes the Word is of no effect. This, however, is a great and terrible privation and injury which we cannot adequately comprehend. Hence the Lord admonishes us all with great ardor in the words: "Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." Evidently these words do not refer to common matters, nor ought they to be treated lightly. It will not do for one to think: Well, if I have time hereafter, when I have gathered together what I need, I will go and hear the Word of God and believe in it, but just now I have other business on hand which profits me more, and to this I must first attend.

Take care, my friend, that you do not deceive yourself. Who knows how long you may yet live, or how long you can hear God's Word, or what trials God may send you? You may succeed in deceiving yourself, but Christ you cannot delude; He exhorts you earnestly when He exclaims: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." It is His desire that you should not procrastinate in these matters as men commonly do. He says, now, when you hear, is the time to heed, else it may be too late.

It behooves us therefore to make sure of our belonging to the small fourth class. To this end we ought to implore earnestly our Father in heaven that we may have good hearts, that they may accept and retain His Word, and bring forth good fruit.

This little company consists of saints; not of “such as the pope has,” all shaven and shorn,” who read mass, fast and wear strange garments, but of such as hear the Word of God, which the pope and his followers persecute with bitter hatred. “They who hear the Word and keep it bring forth, fruit an hundred-fold;” that is, in such abundance that it is beyond all estimation. Or as St. Matthew classifies: “Some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold;” for just as the external offices and duties differ, thus will there also be a variety in the fruit. A minister of the Gospel serves the Church more than a mechanic does, who attends only to his own domestic affairs; yet both are Christians, redeemed by Christ from sin and death; both are heirs of eternal life. Let us strive to be counted among this company, though it is the smallest of them all.

The first requisite to accomplish this is to have “an honest and good heart.” Such a heart is attentive to the Word of God and cherishes it with fidelity, otherwise the devil will surely come and pluck the Word away. Again, the heart must be sure and firm, regardless of the favor or hatred of men, not wavering nor yielding to the allurements of evil; for if we do not fear and love God above all things we cannot keep the Word, which the world and the devil ever attempt to steal away, since they are not able to endure it. Satan is a restless task-master, who does not suffer his servants to be at ease, but urges them on continually, as we see in the Papists, and we shall experience still more in the future.

The heart must also be cleansed and freed from thorns: we dare not love money, fame among men, and worldly pleasures, more than the Word of God and the life to come. We must furthermore regard all other temporal concerns as of inferior importance compared with God’s Word, as Christ says: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God,” etc. Where the heart is thus attentive, faithful and untrammelled by thorns, there we find “an honest and good heart” which will bring forth fruit. It will do this in patience, for it cannot escape sorrows and temptations. Afflictions and oppositions will come, as St. Paul writes: “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” We must be prepared to meet these trials and, as

Christ says, “possess our souls in patience,” always resorting to prayer; for we all must confess that we fall far short of our calling in our relation to the affairs of this life. The devil is ever watchful of our weaknesses and tempts us in various ways, so that he may take from the heart the Word and burden it instead with cares, avarice, pride, anger and other evil affections. We all know sufficiently well that sordidness, ambition, lasciviousness and the like, draw people away from the Word and make them corrupt.

It becomes therefore an urgent necessity to keep a steady eye upon our defects, and to guard against the infirmities of our nature, that we may not continue in a false security. We have the comfortable assurance, Luke 11: “The Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him,” hence we should earnestly supplicate God for the Holy Ghost, that He may remove from our hearts all obstructions to the Word, freeing them from thorns and thistles, so that we can hear and retain it and bring forth good fruit, true faith in Christ; through which faith we will become not only obedient unto God, but also His children and heirs. Then will the seed accomplish the purpose for which it was sown; the holy Gospel which is preached in all the world will thus bring forth fruit in us which remaineth to eternity.

The parable also teaches us not to be amazed when we observe that the Word does not everywhere bring forth fruit; for the Lord Himself divides the hearers into four distinct classes, of which only one, and that the smallest, is “honest and good.” The remaining three classes are of no account; they must be left to themselves, nor ought they to cause us offense. Wherever the Gospel is preached there will also be these three kinds of unworthy hearers. Yet the Word is not at fault, nor does the blame attach to him who preaches it, in the blind Papists in their raving frenzy attempt to charge against us. They point with malicious satisfaction to all the offenses which the devil has stirred up since the Gospel has again been preached, and thus endeavor, in their folly, to bring discredit upon us and our preaching.

But pray, tell me, how was it when Christ Himself preached, and John, and His apostles? Were there not great offenses then, and did not great sins become manifest? When John the Baptist began to preach, all people went out to hear him, and were convinced that he was a holy man, yet he was charged with being possessed of the devil and finally king Herod, who often and willingly listened to him, as the evangelist tells us, had him beheaded.

Yea, though they heard Christ, the Son of God, and saw Him raise the dead and perform other great miracles, they nevertheless nailed Him to the cross. Does it follow from this that John, that Christ, and that the Apostles were not true preachers, because the people remained wicked and would not be converted, as the pure doctrine required of them? To this question they must remain silent, lest they might be exposed as enemies and blasphemers of Christ: but us and our doctrine they revile, because they think it can be done with impunity.

We do not propose to enter at this time into a defense of our doctrine, and to show why we are ready to adhere to it unto death, but will merely call attention to the words of Jesus when He says: "The seed is the Word." We presume that there is no Papist insane enough to assert that the Word, of which Christ speaks in this connection, is an evil word or false doctrine; and yet, what does Christ say of this good seed? Does it grow? Ah, merely a fourth part of it remains in the ground and brings fruit! Who then can deny that the world remains wicked, though the Word and its preaching is good and pure, and in itself productive of good fruit?

As stated above, we will not at this time dwell upon our doctrine nor explain it, but this the Papists must confess, whether they will or not, that the world is wicked and will not receive the Word, no matter how pure is the preaching or how pious the preacher. For Christ tells us plainly that only the fourth part of the seed brings fruit; and His own experience, as also that of John and the apostles, exhibits the fact that but few heed the preaching of the Word. The great majority of mankind is and remains wicked and fruitless; but the smallest portion believe and are converted.

If this was the experience of Christ, the Son of God, the preacher without a blemish, what else could John the Baptist, or the apostles, or we expect? Shall therefore the doctrine be blamed as wrong? If so, we must also denounce the seed which fell by the way, upon a rock, or amid thorns. But no, this would be blasphemy. The Word of God is the seed which is sown; this Word is good and salutary: it must, according to its nature, bring forth good fruit. That it does not everywhere produce fruit is the fault of the barren land upon which it falls, and in which the seed is destroyed; God and His Word must not be held accountable for this.

Hence the Papists have no reason to condemn our doctrine, and to pronounce it wrong because it creates offense here and there; they ought rather to reproach themselves and others, for their hearts are neither honest nor good. The Word which we preach is faultless, but their hearts are impure and wicked. To such the devil comes, and incites them to oppose the Word, as Christ says in that other parable, Matt. 13, where the field was fertile and the seed good, but intermixed with tares. Whence came the tares? Christ answers: "The devil came and sowed them among the wheat;" he hates to see a clean and fruitful field, and is ever busy to make it unproductive. And since he cannot root up the good seed entirely he sows the tares among it. Who then would dare to say that the Word of God is at fault and causes the growth of the tares?

Let every one learn from this parable that the Gospel will always meet with opposition; that some will be converted by it, while the greater portion of its hearers, yea even three-fourths of them, will take offense and disregard it. The result is that many are called, as Christ says in another Gospel, but only few are chosen. The many are of an impure and dishonest heart; they heed the devil more than the Gospel. Hence not only great and glaring sins ensue, but, as the Lord says in our text, such misconduct will be punished with blindness, "that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand."

Let no one therefore be offended at "the Gospel, though it encounters much opposition: the cause of this are the wicked and malicious hearts, in which the devil rules. It is not the fault of the seed if it does not grow by the way-side, or upon the rock, or among the thorns. Be not troubled at such failures, but let each one diligently see to it that he possesses this seed; yea, let us all implore God's mercy that the heart may be prepared to receive and to retain the Word in patience, so that we may be saved through faith in Christ, which the Holy Spirit implants in us by means of the Word and the Holy Sacraments. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ grant this unto all of us! Amen.

First Sermon For The Festival Of The Purification Of Mary. Luke 2:22-32.

And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought Him to Jerusalem, to present Him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons. And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he Him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.

We learn from today's Gospel lesson how the Infant Jesus was brought into the temple when He was six weeks old. According to the law these six weeks were termed "the days of purification." Moses calls them so, and also the Evangelist in our text. This ordinance was not based on natural grounds and was therefore not observed by pagan nations. God had ordained this law for His people, so that every mother who had given birth had to present herself with a sacrifice and with the child in the temple. The

law required that this should be done at the end of six weeks if the child was a son, and at the end of twelve weeks if it was a daughter.

The pope has imposed a similar ordinance upon our women who have given birth. He requires them, after convalescence, to receive in public the blessing of the Church, and forbids them to attend worship before this is done, as though they were unclean. This is wrong; for the impurity which the law imputed to those in childbed was not a natural one, and had its existence only by the old ceremonial law; therefore it has no validity where the law is abolished, and cannot rightly be imposed upon any one.

One especial provision of the Law was this: The first born son shall be presented to the Lord after six weeks have elapsed; for thus we read in Leviticus, chap. 12: "Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;" and this had reference not only to mankind, but equally so to cattle, sheep, etc.; all firstborn male beings were to be dedicated to the Lord. Hence it was that the firstborn son enjoyed especial dignity and honor in the family, and had authority over the other brothers. But inasmuch as among so fruitful a people as Israel was, the number of the firstborn would be by far too great for service in the temple, God gave permission to the parents to ransom their child by paying a certain sum of money, or by offering a one year old lamb or a pair of turtledoves, according as they were rich or poor. Yet the son thus released by his parents from the demands of the Law was nevertheless called a son of God the Lord.

It seems that the Virgin Mary was in want of the goods of this world, for she brought the offering which poor people were wont to bring, a pair of turtledoves. With such an offering she releases her son and thus acknowledges that, though she is His true mother, He is not her own, but that, being the firstborn, He is the Son of God.

The Lord had ordained this custom of presenting to Him all firstborn males, that the Jews might remember how He, their God, rescued them from Egypt and there in one night slew all the firstborn throughout the whole land. As a memorial of that deliverance He demanded of them to present and to offer to Him, in the temple all their firstborn, males. This requirement exists no more, and we Christians are free from the observance of this custom, just as we are exempt from all other ceremonial laws of the Jews.

What we are to learn from this occurrence in our Gospel is simply this: Christ, voluntarily fulfills the Law, although it has no claims upon Him, How consoling this is for us we heard on the festival of the circumcision. We will therefore at this time consider such obedience as an example for us in the performance of our duties and good works in our daily life. For the obedience of the Child Jesus and of His mother stand forth in great glory in this connection, and put us to shame. We are never ready to do even half of what we ought to do, although God demands it, of us, under pain of damnation and eternal burning.

Such disobedience on our part corresponds ill to this example, where the Child Jesus, the Lord over the Law and Moses and everything; else, so humbles Himself that He fulfills all that Moses, His servant, required of other children, who are all impure and sinners. Likewise does the Virgin Mary. She knew well enough that she was still a virgin, and consequently exempt from the demands of the Law; for Moses with his regulation in this regard has reference only to women who become pregnant in the usual way. Yet Mary is not willing to make use of this exemption, since others, who were ignorant of the facts in the case, might be offended; she therefore readily fulfills what it behooved other women to do according to the Law.

These two examples, of the Child Jesus and of Mary His mother, must cause us to blush when we think how derelict we are in the performance of our duties, which the Lord, from whom we have everything, has prescribed to us, whilst we see Him voluntarily do that which His servant Moses demands, though He could not justly be asked to do it, since the Law had no claims upon Him. O, that we could sufficiently blush at our wickedness! We would have to spit upon ourselves and exclaim: We are not worthy that the sun should shine upon us. Our Lord and Savior subjects Himself to the Law, and with His obedience condemns our disobedience in the most severe and effective manner. He thus condemns disobedience to our God, who can either hurl us into hell or admit us to heaven.

Christ's obedience exhibits and rebukes our disobedience so thoroughly that we must be ashamed of ourselves from the crown of our head to the soles of our feet; yea, we must cry out: What are we doing, we miserable worms of the dust! Will we not also become obedient unto the Lord who became man on our account, who lay in the manger for us, who suffered Himself to be carried to Jerusalem in our "behalf, there to do what His

servant Moses demanded, who had no right to ask anything of Him! He Himself is the Lord, and Moses does not even deserve to be His servant; yet we see Him do what He was not bound to perform. But we do not perform what we are bound to do under pain of eternal damnation. To be ashamed of our disobedience and obstinacy, is the first simple lesson taught us today by the glorious example of Jesus Christ our Lord.

The second lesson presents the dignity of the firstborn son, whom God so greatly honors that He calls him His own, yea, even His son. This was indeed a great glory and preference, which the Jews were not slow to claim when they looked down with haughtiness upon their kindred, as though God cared only for the firstborn. We have plenty of examples which show but too plainly that the firstborn in a family frequently proved themselves the most degenerate and wicked; they became overbearing and proud, so that they treated others with scorn, whilst they regarded themselves as the chosen ones of God. If this Law still prevailed we would all eagerly desire to be such proud striplings, as is evident in the behavior of the monks. If these fellows could yet boast of being God's holy children by virtue of their birth, just think how intolerably insolent and overbearing they would be; for in truth they are haughty enough already with their lousy cowl.

This arrogance has proved fatal to the firstborn, as it did to Lucifer the archangel. Cain was a firstborn son, and was considered so important that his mother Eve gave him the name which should indicate him as the man who would crush the head of the serpent, for she says: "I have gotten a man from the Lord." But as pride changed Lucifer from an angel into a devil, it also made of Cain a villain and a fratricide.

Ishmael was also a firstborn son and is called in the Scripture "a mocker," Gen. 21, who looked with contempt upon his younger brother Isaac, and conducted himself as if he were the heir instead of Isaac. Thus pride and arrogance had led many firstborn sons astray, deeming themselves alone the well-beloved of God, and from this presumption they were often punished with deep humiliation. Esau depended upon his birth, and in such vain trust became the oppressor of his brother; but God punished his haughtiness and caused him to be deprived of the blessing, as were Cain and Ishmael.

The Jews met with the same fate. They were indeed the firstborn son in the kingdom of God and in the Church of Christ, while we, of heathen lineage, were the second. But when they became proud and reckless God said to them: Your glory has departed; I have not chosen you as my peculiar people that you in insolence should treat others with contempt, but that you might be grateful unto me and do my will with readiness. Since you have refused to comply with, my will, you must now make room for the heathens; they shall have precedence; your place is in the rear, if you are not excluded entirely.

David was compelled to, make a similar decision; he took their birthright from his elder sons and placed Solomon, who was the youngest, upon the throne. Thus it was God's will, that pride might be restrained.

The selection of David himself is another example. The Lord sent to the prophet Samuel to anoint as king the son of Jesse. The oldest one presented himself first; he was a bold, imperious youth, as we learn from 1 Samuel 17, where we hear him speak to David in the camp, as if the youth were his servant. But the Lord refused him and all the seven sons, of Jesse so that the prophet had to inquire: "Are here all thy children?" Jesse answered: "There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep," It never entered the mind of Jesse that God would make anything important of the youngest son. But after all it was he with whom God was pleased. The eldest and firstborn was not acceptable to God, as He Himself says to Samuel: "The Lord sees not as man seeth: for man, looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart, etc.

Why does God overstep His own regulation in making David king, who was the youngest of the sons, whereas after the Word and ordinance of God it would have behooved the eldest to, be king? He did this to show us that He does not desire to have any one elated with pride, and that His Ordinances and blessing were not given to us that we should be puffed up by them. He will not have haughty children, but the humble are, pleading to Him, It is an easy matter for the Lord to make an end to the lofty aspirations of the proud and to humble them into the dust. Hence, it was that Cain, Ishmael, Esau, the Jews and the angels lost their high estate; they became proud and abused their privileges, and were, in the end, in spite of their primogeniture, lodged with the devil in the abyss of hell, as we read in the 113 Psalm: "Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who

humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth! He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;" and Mary in her thanksgiving exclaims: "He has put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree."

It is the way of God to overthrow the proud in heart; for He will not endure pride or presumption, nor does He bestow His gifts upon us that we should think ourselves to have deserved them. Hence the Lord frequently prefers and elevates the child of a common man, while He divests a king of royalty and hurls him into ruin.

Seniority by birth was highly esteemed among the Jews; the Word of God assigned to it supremacy in temporal and spiritual matters; but when its privileges were abused through pride and insolence, God annulled the regulations pertaining to it. Reuben was a firstborn son, but by the curse of Jacob he was deprived of that authority and priesthood which his birth by right would have conferred upon him. It is presumed that Abraham was the youngest son; yet God invests him with the dignity and power which belonged to the eldest and firstborn.

The fact is well established that the eldest sons are but seldom of a modest behavior, for they generally think themselves masters in the family. They are proud and overbearing towards their brothers, whom they regard as inferior to themselves in the sight of God. But God cannot permit such presumption to prevail, and resists the haughty; He puts down the proud in spirit, but exalts the lowly in heart.

Let therefore no one boast of his gifts and talents. If we have wisdom and erudition, let us employ them to the honor of God and to the welfare of our fellow-men. If we are puffed up, the displeasure of God will be our lot. If we are comely in person, virtuous or wealthy, in short, if we are blessed with any unusual endowments, let us beware of pride on account of them; God has ever manifested His displeasure at such insolent conduct, and has made an example of the first and most prominent patriarchs, which should caution us in this regard. Christ, of course, sustained well the honor and beauty of His birthright, for He was free from sin.

Other firstborn sons have frequently perverted their great honor and high position to the gratification of pride and selfishness, until in the end all glory vanished from the Jews, so that the heathens, whom they regarded

with utter contempt, have now superseded them. The Christian Church is now the well-beloved and the firstborn child of God, She is this, not with external splendor and glory, as the pope would have it, but on account of the Word and the Holy Sacraments. Though we differ from each other in our various stations in life, we are still all one by reason of our Baptism. The Christian Church is the mother of us all; she is a pure virgin in a spiritual sense; having the pure Word of God and the Holy Sacraments, she continually gives birth to children, to Christians. These are in truth the firstborn sons, the heirs of God, and thus we observe the realization of that which was formerly but typical and figurative.

If God had made various and extraordinary arrangements for us, if He had instituted a separate Baptism for you or for me, if He had given to you or to me an especial Gospel or sacrament, we would surely have become a prey of the devil by reason of our vanity. But since God makes no distinction among us, since we all have but one Baptism, one mother, the Church of Christ, one Faith, one Word and Sacrament, no one has a right to despise his brother; we must admit that our brethren as well as we are firstborn sons and heirs. There can be no doubt that we are, one and all, kings and priests in the dominion of Christ, notwithstanding that in temporal affairs distinctions still must exist.

Hence it is evident that the pope has no right whatever to deem himself far superior to others in the government of the Church; no one gave him such authority, unless it be the devil himself. Among Christians, as such, there exists no difference in rank; no one is more exalted than his brother; the rights and privileges are the same for all. Preachers, pastors and other servants of the Church are not children of God by virtue of their office, but they are such by reason of their Baptism; this, and the Word and faith in the Word, make us children of God, His firstborn sons and heirs.

Those eldest sons in the Old Testament are thus an example for us, from which we should learn that the Lord our God will never endure pride and arrogance, and that He will put down those who exalt themselves. Let each one therefore humble himself of his own accord. The world objects to this, and greatly abuses in her vanity even the inferior gifts which she possesses. God therefore puts down the mighty ones in quick succession, so that they tumble headlong, as Lucifer and his angels fell from heaven.

This is the first part of the narrative in our Gospel, as far as it relates to the offering in the temple. The Evangelist further recounts what occurred when the Child Jesus was presented to the Lord in the temple as a firstborn son, with the offering required by the Law. We shall speak of this more fully in the following sermon, while we now invoke the mercy of God that we may shun all pride, that our hearts may be prepared by His Holy Spirit for a true and earnest obedience, and that through His grace we may continue in the same unto our end. Amen.

Second Sermon For The Festival Of The Purification Of Mary. The Old Man Simeon. Luke 2:22-32.

This is an excellent narrative and contains a delightful discourse and prophecy of the patriarch Simeon concerning the Child Jesus. The incident here mentioned is another of those manifestations by which this Child was made known in the world, especially to His people Israel.

The first manifestation occurred to the Virgin Mary through the angel Gabriel, Luke 1; the second, also through the angel, to Joseph, Matt. 1; the third, through Elisabeth, the mother of St. John the Baptist, Luke 1, when the Child leaped in her womb at the coming of the holy Virgin Mary, the mother of the Lord. The fourth manifestation was made by Zacharias, the father of John, Luke 1, when he showed, though he did not point out the person, that Christ had come and that God had remembered and fulfilled His covenant.

Upon these manifestations which took place before the birth of Christ, others followed. First, that of the angel to the shepherds upon the field, who went forth announcing everywhere the tidings of the angel, Luke 2. Then came the manifestation to the Gentiles by means of a star, Matt. 2; and finally, the two by Simeon and the prophetess Anna, who publicly and plainly spoke in the temple concerning the Child Jesus, declaring that He is the consolation of Israel, and the Redeemer of the world from sin and death.

The statements made about this old man Simeon are wonderful. We are told by the Evangelist that “He was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.” That means: Simeon firmly believed that God would

soon fulfill His promise and send Christ the Lord, and that this would happen before his death, so that he could yet see with his bodily eyes Christ his Savior. This was not a mere notion, such as men sometimes entertain of events before they occur, but Simeon was prompted to this opinion by the Holy Ghost through the Word of God, where he had undoubtedly read the prophecy of the holy patriarch Jacob, Gen. 49, that Christ would come when the scepter had departed from Judea, and when a foreign nation would rule the land. He had, no doubt, also perused the calculation of Daniel concerning the seventy-two weeks. Such predictions led the aged and pious man to believe that the time of the birth of Christ must be nigh at hand; yea, the Holy Ghost had revealed it to him that he should not die before he had seen and borne upon his arms Christ the Lord.

Thus it came to pass when Mary and Joseph, according to the custom of the law, came into the temple to present the Child to the Lord and to offer the prescribed sacrifices, that at that very hour the old man Simeon also entered the temple. This was not accidental nor after his usual custom; but by a revelation of the Holy Ghost he knew in his heart: Now the moment has arrived with which God has often comforted me; now I shall find in the temple what I never before have seen there, – Him whose coming I have so anxiously awaited. Therefore, as soon as he had come where the Child was, he took Him with a rejoicing heart from the arms of Mary, and, while holding the Infant in a caressing embrace, he declares in few but impressive words what he thinks of Christ.

No doubt the people were astonished at these wonderful sayings, especially the priests who may have thought that the old man Simeon had suddenly become childish. For here was only a little Child, six weeks old, in appearance like other children of that age, and besides all this His parents were poor and insignificant people. But these circumstances do not perplex Simeon; he plainly states the fact: This is the Child whom we must have if we wish to be saved: we Jews, the heathens and the entire world. Precious old man, where did you learn this truth? What is there in this Child that reveals unto you His dignity? Surely it is a Child like other children who are brought in great numbers into the temple during the year, some of whom are children of great lords surrounded with every luxury, – how is it then that you say that this very Child is the Savior?

Mary and Joseph are amazed at this revelation and miracle of the Holy Ghost. They cannot doubt that the old man was moved by the Holy Ghost, for how else would it have been possible for him to know what had been revealed only to them by the angel?

From this we learn the nature of the Church in those times, and how the Holy Ghost directed and ruled it. The High-priests, Herod, the Scribes, the Levites and the Pharisees were in Jerusalem, but they did not concern themselves about the Scriptures nor about the Messiah; their endeavor was to obtain honor, power and riches. Then there was also a little company, poor and unknown: Mary, Joseph, Zacharias, Elisabeth, the shepherds, Simeon and Anna the prophetess. The hope and comfort of these was the prophecy concerning Christ, and fondly did they await its fulfillment; hence they enjoyed its blessings, while the high-priests were deprived of them.

The same holds true today. The pure Church is but a small, despised and suffering company, which has however the comfort of God's Word; this it studies, and concerns itself but little about other matters. The pope and his followers, on the other hand, arrogate to themselves the name of the Church, while in fact they are totally ignorant of God, of Christ and of His Gospel; nor can it be otherwise, since they seek but that which is of this world, and claim the name of Christians because they have more power, honor, temporal authority, money and goods than others.

At this we must not be offended. The high priests have their office and hold it; yet they are not the true Church. Thus in our day the pope, his bishops and their tribe call themselves the Church, exercise authority and boast of their office and dignity, to which God called them, while in truth they are neither the Church nor even Christians; for if they were they would not persecute the Gospel, but would accept it and assist in spreading it. Compared with them Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna are common and simple people whom no one respects, yet they alone know and possess Christ; with them the Holy Spirit dwells, who leads them into all truth, so that they are saved.

Let therefore no one suppose that the pope and his crowd must certainly be God's people because they exercise much authority and power. No, those who had office and power were not the true Israel when Christ was born. Again the unpretending little assembly ought not to be despised; God rules

on earth in such a manner that the wise and proud do not desire Him, while He is the comfort of the poor and distressed. These know of no other consolation, while the former depend upon their authority, power and wealth. This may suffice in regard to the first portion of the narrative, showing how the aged Simeon, through the Holy Ghost, recognizes in the little Child Jesus the true Christ.

We will now consider Simeon's sermon, in which he teaches what comfort and enjoyment this Child brings. Then also what the effects of His coming will be throughout the world, that we may thus also learn to know Christ and be saved through Him.

The Evangelist relates, in the first place, that it was revealed to Simeon "that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ." When this was fulfilled in the temple, he having seen the Child Jesus and taken Him upon his arms, he was filled with joy, so that he exclaimed with cheerful satisfaction: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word." That is: I will now die without fear or trembling, yea with joy. Such words are wonderful and peculiar. We all know how men generally act when death approaches, There is no rejoicing then; nothing but unrest, fear, sorrow, pain, anguish and trembling. Nor is this unnatural; even the brute creation acts thus when death approaches!

Our death however is the result of sin; for through sin death came; and that sin makes the heart fearful is a common experience. Hence our death is harder and more terrible than that of other creatures, for we hate to fear the wrath and judgment of God, which endure after death and continue eternally. If it were not thus, men Would not mind death so much. It is true that the separation from wife, children, kindred, friends and earthly possessions, which are all defer to us, is painful; still this is nothing compared with that agony which the conviction that we are sinners and that We must appear before the judgment-seat of God produces. Yet death will come; we cannot escape it.

The world, therefore, cannot join in with Simeon in his song of cheerfulness, but will cry out when death is near: O God, we have not been Thy servants and must now depart full of uncertainty, sorrow and fear, so that we know not what to do. We know, indeed, what we leave behind us on earth; but what is in store for us beyond the grave we know not, and we

must tremble in view of God's wrath and eternal damnation. Such thoughts will possess the hearts of men when the final hour of departure from this world arrives, nor can reason give us any consolation; fear and anguish of soul will overwhelm all our natural faculties.

It is therefore a most superior science and art of which this old man Simeon is master, and which we ought to learn, that we may have different thoughts of death. Simeon is very aged and death stares him in the face; yea, he feels it in all the members of his body, as aged persons do, that his dissolution is drawing nearer and nearer; yet this does not distress him; no, he prays that it may come soon. He is fearless and cares not for death, but rather welcomes it, since he has seen his Savior. Where this consolation is wanting, there, alas! can be no peace in the dying hour.

How did Simeon obtain this fearless confidence? He was a man, and as such imperfect, so that he had to plead guilty before God. But what can sin and peace have in common? Sin and restlessness, coming from an accusing conscience, agree well enough, but peace of mind cannot harmonize with sin. Nevertheless we see that Simeon does not permit sin to rob him of his peaceful assurance, as little as he permits death to terrify him. Such a disposition of the heart is wonderful, and we ought all to endeavor to obtain it, since we all must sooner or latter pass through this trial. Kind old Simeon is not selfish, and gladly teaches us how to learn this art and whence to obtain a peaceful heart; he says "For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." He speaks of the Child Jesus and calls Him by a glorious name – Savior. Whether he first asked the mother, which is very probable, or not, what the name of the Child was, one thing is sure, he uses the proper name and speaks of the Child as the angel has spoken, who also called Him a Savior, ordained of God Himself to be a Savior. Of this glorious name we have spoken on the festival of Christmas and New Year.

Long before this occurred God ordained in temporal affairs helpers and saviors: rulers of the state, the parental authority of father and mother, physicians for times of sickness, jurists for matters at law. The Child Jesus, however, was not such a savior as these, else Simeon would not have derived from Him the necessary support against sin and death.

From the declaration of Simeon, that he can now depart in peace because he has seen the salvation of God, it follows that this Child is a Savior from

sin, death and hell, otherwise he would not have found consolation in Him. These words are few, but of the utmost importance. Simeon gives this name only to this Child, so that other children, no matter who they are and what their names may be, cannot be considered saviors from sin and death, and whoever would think so would deceive himself and remain in misery.

With this name Savior, which Simeon bestows upon the Child, he extracts the fang from the mouth of the law and the priesthood, and other ceremonial observances, and cautions every one against regarding such institutions as saviors, and plainly asserts that he who has nothing to depend on but the Law and good works, will surely go to the devil. This he intends to say when he calls the Child Jesus a Savior, for besides Him there is no salvation. When the Jews look upon their sacrifices and ten commandments as a savior, or when the pitiable pope and his crowd make the mass, and pilgrimages and indulgences, together with other works, their saviors, they commit a fatal error; for it is an eternal truth that this Child alone is the Savior, and nothing else in heaven or on earth can perform the work of salvation.

Simeon means exactly what he says: "My eyes have seen Thy salvation," the salvation which God in heaven has ordained. The world will persist in the creation of other fancied saviors from sin and death. The Jew expects to obtain mercy from God if he refrains from eating pork, if he keeps the Sabbath and is circumcised, etc. The monk regards his monastic life as a guarantee of heaven for him. Each one selects a separate saint to intercede for him, and thus to be his savior. There is no end to the absurd penances and idolatrous ceremonies in the pope's church. Faithful Simeon wished to warn all against such grievous mistakes, and to teach us to accept the only true Savior of whom we stand in need, and whom God Himself ordained to be our Helper. If we have Him we are safe; for God the Father in heaven, did send this Child Jesus to be a Savior and to bring us salvation.

Whoever possesses this salvation of God can be content and happy; no matter how terrible death may seem, or how sin and death may glare at us, we shall not be terrified, for we have an omnipotent, divine Savior, abundantly able to rescue us from the dominion of sin and death, and to transfer us into the kingdom of God.

It is necessary that we look to this Child, that we take Him upon our arms and caress Him with fond embraces, as Simeon did; and this we will do if we make Him the only joy, comfort and consolation of our heart. If our hearts are once firm in the conviction that this Child is the salvation of God for us, it must follow that we become contented and fearless in the presence of sin and death; for against these very foes we have this Helper.

How does this Child save us? John the Baptist answers this question when he calls Christ the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world, yea, even a victim for us upon the cross. Thus the Child Jesus is the only true Savior, who redeems us from sin and death through His death and resurrection, without any assistance on our part. We can never merit eternal life, though we fulfill our Christian obligations, and by no obedience of our own can we be justified before God, We are never free from sin, nor can we completely fulfill the Law. We are acceptable to God only through our Savior and Mediator Christ, whom we must receive with a faithful heart.

This lesson then must be well learned: Whoever wishes to escape death and to be freed from sin must trust in this Savior, whom God Himself has appointed to carry our sins and to purchase our redemption by His blood. He who has this confidence can under all circumstances, even amid dangers and death, exclaim with Simeon: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace," while he who places his hope on something else will ever be devoid of peace and full of fear; he has no Savior, and remains in death and condemnation.

Nor ought we to suppose that Simeon enjoyed an advantage which we do not possess, since he was permitted to see the Child Jesus with his mortal eyes, and to take Him upon his arms; for indeed this outward meeting was of no avail to him. Other Jews were present then, and likewise saw the Child; yet they went to hell. Simeon was benefited by the sight because he believed that the Child was his Savior, although the eyes saw only a little infant six weeks old. Faith and not sight was necessary here.

If we do thus, Simeon will surely have but a small, or rather no advantage at all over us. Though he was permitted to see what we cannot see with our eyes, he had to exercise the same faith that we must employ if any benefit is expected against sin and death. What more could we desire? Hence Simeon, being unselfish and desiring others to enjoy this Child

together with himself, speaks of Him thus: “Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people.”

This Child is a Savior from sin and death, and Simeon is comforted in Him. He says: Not for me alone did God do this; there are many others who belong to the happy number thus blessed of God. This Savior is prepared before the face of all people, and for the entire world.

In this declaration Simeon makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, although there was a great difference in their mode of worship and of living. Simeon does not think of this at all in this connection, for he knows that where sin and eternal death come into consideration there exists no difference among men. Jews are sinners as well as the Gentiles; they are all guilty of eternal condemnation, and circumcision cannot save them, nor will the name “people of God” do it, or the fact that they had the law. These privileges can not rescue them from sin and death; this Savior alone can do it. This fact is expressed by Simeon in one sentence: God has prepared salvation before the face of all people. This corresponds with the prophecy given to Abraham that through his seed all the generations upon earth should be blessed. When all generations on earth are mentioned or, as Simeon says, “all people,” then neither Jews nor Gentiles are excluded, for they are all under the curse. If this Savior comes for all people, it follows that all the nations who have Him are not without assistance and without a Savior.

This is the first lesson which we learn from these words of Simeon:; he calls Jews and Gentiles damnable sinners, who can be saved only through this Savior.

Again, by a careful meditation upon these words we find much consolation in them. Our uneasiness, sorrow and tribulation, comes from the consciousness of our wickedness. We fear that if we had to die today or tomorrow God would deal with us according to our deserts and would condemn us for our sins. We cannot believe that He is merciful, that He forgives sins, and will save us without any merit of our own. Our hearts represent God as a stern ruler and implacable judge, who is ever ready to exercise the greatest severity. By entertaining such thoughts concerning God we become timid, full of fear, and finally we despair, because we know not how to stand before the judgment-seat of God. But what says Simeon?

He portrays God far otherwise. If it were His intention to refuse mercy to sinners and to destroy them, why should He give us Christ as our Savior? But according to the words of Simeon, God has prepared and ordained such a Savior before the face of all people, that they should possess Him.

It must therefore be God's will and intention to rescue us, as St. Paul says, 1 Tim. 2: "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth," – to be saved not from temporal ills, but from sin and death. To do this a Savior is necessary, and Him God prepared before the face of all people. Why then should we be afraid of God, who Himself desires our welfare for time and eternity, yea, who has also prepared the means whereby this can be accomplished?

That many, even the greater portion of men, are damned, does not take place according to God's will and purpose, but because people will not conduct themselves according to the gracious will of God, and refuse to accept this Savior whom God has given for the salvation of all. If a wealthy person summoned to him all the beggars in a city to relieve their wants, but the call remained unheeded by many, whose fault is it then if these beggars remain in their poverty? Surely their own. If they had not been such lazy fellows they would have come when called, and would have been made rich; Thus it is with the world. Simeon, the pious patriarch, does not lie, God gave this Savior unto all people, that they might have Him and be saved by Him.

If the Jews are so reckless as to despise Him, if the pope, the Turks and the heathens disregard Him, who is to blame? Let them go their way and make their own saviors; they will in the end meet the fate which they have prepared for themselves. Think not that God will make especial arrangements for your salvation; if you desire to be saved you must embrace this Child. If you believe that God is merciful unto you for Christ's sake, that He will forgive you your sins and will bring you into heaven, you will surely be saved, for Christ is the Savior from sin and death. But if you refuse Him and presume to do without His help, it is your lookout, and if you are damned you need not blame any one else; you yourself, and your shameful, horrible and wicked unbelief and obstinacy did it.

God has "prepared salvation," which fact clearly indicates that He is merciful and does not desire our death; yea, He has prepared this salvation

“before all people,” that every one might enjoy its blessings. Simeon, Mary, Peter and Paul were not the only ones to have a savior, but all the nations of the earth shall own Him. He who desires to obtain help against sin and death shall find it, for thus God has ordained it as a kind and indulgent Father. Let us therefore take heed that We do not exclude ourselves by our unbelief from the salvation which God has prepared, and which He faithfully extends unto us, as Simeon here declares. For to make the meaning of these words perfectly plain, he adds to the former expression this saying concerning Christ: “A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.” Here we have the reason why God gave this Savior, namely, that He should be a Redeemer for all nations, for Jews and for Gentiles. The Gentiles are enveloped in deepest ignorance, for they have no Word of God; hence they know nothing of Him. They are equally afraid of God and of the devil, and frequently seek help from the latter before they turn to God for assistance. Where there is no knowledge of God, all kinds of sin will be indulged: idolatry, blasphemy, and every lawlessness. Such is the condition of the Gentiles.

For these also God has prepared a Savior, as these words clearly state. Why did He do this? Surely not that they should remain in their deplorable ignorance and condemnation; but He gave this light unto the Gentiles that they should thereby come to a knowledge of God and be saved. It was the will of God that Christ should thus become a Savior also for the heathens, the great and desperate offenders.

God, who thus manifests His kindness and mercy, His love and tenderness, without anger and austerity, must indeed be a gracious God, as Christ Himself says, John 8: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Hence we cannot bring greater indignity upon God than by asserting that He is our enemy because we are sinners, and that He desires us to perish in our wickedness. Yet such erring thoughts of God are deeply rooted in our hearts, else we would have more assurance and a happier state of mind; we would not tremble nor be filled with torturing fears.

We see in this connection also how the old man Simeon was a diligent student of the prophets. His knowledge in these matters was not born in him, but he derived it from the Word of God. We have already shown that

he applied the prophecies of Jacob and of Daniel, and also those of Abraham, in regard to the coming Savior of the world, to the Child which he now held upon his arms. As he had learned from Daniel and Jacob the time in which Christ would come, and from Abraham that He would be a universal Savior, so he had also studied the prophet Isaiah, and had there found the declaration that the Child would be a light unto the Gentiles; for thus says Isaiah, 49. chapter:

“It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.” Simeon must have been well acquainted with this saying, else he could not have made such appropriate use of it in his declaration concerning the Child Jesus. The Gentiles are thus called to enjoy the blessings of Christ; He is to be their light, and through His Gospel they are to obtain a knowledge of God and everlasting life.

The Jews did not grope along in such utter darkness as the heathens, for they possessed the Word of God and were called His people; hence they had a glorious light which did not shine unto the Gentiles. Why then did Christ come to the Jews, or for what purpose did God send Him unto Israel? Simeon answers: “He is to be the glory of Thy people Israel.” Although this people was abundantly blessed of God with His Word, sacrifices and other gifts, they were still submerged in the filth of sin and prostrated under the power of death; nor could they release themselves. This disgrace was far greater than that external honor. Hence Simeon means to say: The Jews have thus far held a more honorable position in the world than the Gentiles, but all this preeminence has but little value when the disorder under which they labor is taken into consideration. Now, however, their true glory is at hand, because through this Savior they shall be God’s people, not only for a short period here on earth, but also in heaven forever. Isaiah proclaims the same truth when he says: “Christ shall raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the preserved of Israel.”

This then is the happy and glorious declaration concerning Christ – what He shall accomplish, how we shall enjoy Him, and how we shall be rescued by Him as our Savior from death, that we can be content and cheerful in every misfortune and tribulation. Of this we must, preach today, since the

history of this festival and the pious patriarch Simeon with his declarations require it of us.

But is this done? The pope has too much else to do today. He must consecrate wax and candles – surely an important work; for how could a Christian die unless a sacred candle was kept burning near his death-bed? And then the poor women in child-bed, – what would become of them if they were not enabled to make little crosses of these consecrated tapers and fix them on the wall? Why, the devil would run away with them, no doubt! O, you shameless and forlorn Papists! Instead of taking this Child Jesus upon your arms as Simeon did, and instead of directing the dying and the sick to Him as their only comfort and support, you substitute for Him a miserable little taper to ward off Satan and death!

Then they form a procession, in which every one carries a burning candle. Such custom prevails upon this day in the church of the pope, and the carrying of lighted tapers in a procession is intended to represent the going of Joseph and Mary with the Child into the temple. There are however other explanations of this use of the candles.

If we inquire whence this mode of worship is derived, the Papists will tell us that the old heathens were accustomed to march in procession through cities and villages on the first day of February, and that pope Sergius accepted this practice and adapted it to the true worship of God, Strange fellows indeed, this pope and all the Papists, who learned from heathens how to arrange divine worship in the Christian Church! They came by such stupidity quite naturally, however, because they refused to consider the glorious sayings concerning the Child Jesus, and cared nothing for them.

Let us be duly grateful to God that we are freed from such blindness, and that the radiant light, of which Simeon speaks, shines upon us. May our Father in heaven in mercy preserve unto us this light, so that it may illumine, comfort and make us eternally happy! Amen.

Quinquagesima. Luke 18:81-43.

Then He took unto Him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death; and the third day He shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken. And it came to pass, that as He was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: and hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto Him: and when he was come near, He asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

The Gospel for this day comprises two parts. In the first we have the prediction which Christ makes to His apostles concerning His passion. To these words the angels refer, when they, on Easter morning, tell the women at the tomb, Luke 24: "Remember how He spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee, saying, the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." For these words were spoken by Christ on His last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, where He was crucified. The second part of our Gospel relates the wonderful cure of the blind man.

The Evangelist states three times that the disciples did not comprehend this prediction. They regarded His words as having some unusual and hidden meaning. They understood not a single word of these sayings, for they reasoned thus: This man performs so many miracles, He raises the dead, He gives the blind their sight, etc., from all of which it is evident that He will yet become a person of high position, for it is plain that God is with Him. Besides this, the Scriptures declare of Him that He shall have a glorious kingdom and exercise dominion over kings and princes on earth, while we, His servants, will also become princes and great lords. For who could in the least injure such a Person, who controls death and cures all infirmities with a single word? If He so desires, He can make the heathens His subjects and put beneath His feet all His enemies. Hence they came to the conclusion that God loves Him too much to suffer any harm to befall Him; His sayings in regard to His sufferings and death must surely have another meaning. Thus reasoned the apostles in their simplicity.

God's works are indeed incomprehensible, if they are considered before they are accomplished, but as soon as they are finished they are perfectly plain and intelligible. St. John states repeatedly that the disciples did oftentimes not understand the words of Christ, until the acts to which they referred had been accomplished. It is therefore necessary to have faith in the Word of God when He speaks He refers to matters far beyond the power of our comprehension; hence it behooves us to believe what He says, and then we shall fully experience and understand the true meaning of His words.

I will show this by an example. The Word of God tells us of the resurrection of the dead; our reason cannot conceive of it. Hence we see that those skilled in the wisdom of this world, the learned who adore reason and by it wish to interpret the Word of God, laugh at us and deem us fools, because we believe that there is another life after the present is ended. Again, reason will never comprehend how it is that God became man and was born of a virgin. The fact must be accepted in faith until we come into that other life, where we shall see it all and say: Now I understand and see that it is really true what I have believed. Reason also makes light of the fact that through Baptism with water the mercy and grace of God is conferred upon us without our merits, and that we have the forgiveness of our sins in holy absolution. She cannot understand how this is possible, and regards those who believe it as fools and simpletons. She argues thus: If

God is to be appeased, something more is needed than this; good works and penances must do it. The pope thinks so too; he always urges people to depend on their good works.

Reason obstinately refuses to believe that through Baptism and faith in Christ we obtain salvation; she regards the Word as an inferior matter and him who proclaims it as a poor, infirm sinner. She considers it folly for man to entrust his body and soul to such a faith. No matter how often and plainly the Word of God is proclaimed to men, reason cannot and will not accept it: she has no faith. The world will therefore ever regard the holy Gospel as a heresy and devilish doctrine, which allures people away from the truth and prevents them from doing good works. This is the judgment of reason.

Let us therefore learn to have faith in all simplicity, so that we can say from our heart: What God says is true, whether my senses corroborate it or not. He is omnipotent and can fulfill His Word, and though I do not fully comprehend it while on earth, I shall know it all in the life to come.

The Scriptures exhibit the same truth in other examples. Before David enters upon the combat with Goliath, he has the faith that he shall conquer and slay his enemy, as he says to Saul: "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." 1 Sam. 17. He says: This uncircumcised Philistine shall fare like the lion and the bear, for he has blasphemed the Lord's anointed. To the Philistine he says:

"This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee." David spoke these words publicly, so that all could hear them, and they who heard them laughed at them and regarded them as idle boasting. Nor would they have been anything else if they had been merely the words of David; but they were the declarations of God, and David believed them before they were fulfilled. The result justified his faith, and it mattered not whether others laughed at his confidence or not, whether they believed or doubted his assertions; what he said came to pass and was true nevertheless. Reason thought it absurd that little David should undertake the contest with Goliath, that he with no weapon but a sling and pebble should think of conquering the giant. David however believed, and went and accomplished it. Then it was evident to all that he had spoken the truth.

As long as David had simply said: “This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand,” the matter seemed incredible and impossible. Reason went to work and calculated with Saul, 1 Sam. 17: David is but a lad, a rustic shepherd, who has never been in battle, and goes into the conflict with staff and sling as if to drive away a dog, so that Goliath mockingly asks him: “Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?” The giant comes up with his heavy armor and ponderous spear. Is this not an unequal equipment, and is it not foolhardy for the little slinger David to undertake what the boldest warrior in the camp did not venture to attempt? David could not understand how it would be done, but he believed firmly that God would be his help, and would punish the blasphemy of the Philistine. His faith was not put to shame.

Thus it will ever be. God’s word and will are not believed before they are accomplished. Yet, what He wills is carried out quickly and easily. Our duty is to believe His Word implicitly, even before it is fulfilled. Reason can never understand how Baptism is a laver of regeneration, nor how the bodies of the dead will arise on the day of resurrection. The bodies of many pious persons even are eaten by birds of prey, by dogs and wolves; some are burned to ashes and these cast into rivers, as it happened to John Huss at the Council of Constance. Reason asks: How can God gather these particles again into a body? It seems indeed incredible and impossible, but God declares that it shall be done. He is almighty and can bring forth something out of nothing; therefore we believe that He can do this also, and it will surely be done.

What were we a hundred years ago? Just what the child is which shall be born twenty, thirty or forty years after we have ceased to live. Since God knoweth how to create all things out of nothing, He will surely be able to make something again out of that which once was. Therefore we need not inquire whether a thing be possible, but whether God has said that it shall be done; if He has made such declaration, it will be done, though it may seem otherwise entirely impossible. My inability to comprehend how something is done, does not make its execution impossible for the Lord, who is omnipotent and can make something of nothing.

Hence those people who would measure God and His works by the standard of their reason are, beyond all endurance, provoking idiots. Because I cannot restore to life the dead, shall it therefore be impossible for

God to do it? Take care then, and do not judge God's word and power by your own imagination and ability. If your reason were capable of understanding everything, God might have kept His revelation to Himself. But His declarations are a proof that our human reason is imperfect and knows but little. God's Word is far above the limits of our reason, as our experience teaches us.

I proclaim to you the forgiveness of your sins, and absolve you according to the command of Christ. You hear the word of absolution, and when you have heard it and are absolved from sin, you may still not feel that God and His angels smile on you benignly. You know nothing of that joy of which the Lord speaks when He says: The angels in heaven shall rejoice over a sinner that repenteth.

If you are baptized, you will have after Baptism the same skin and flesh which you had before. Shall therefore Absolution and Baptism be of no effect? Never! Learn rather to say: God has baptized me, God has absolved me by His Word; I firmly believe that He is gracious unto me, and has received me as His child, that Christ is my Lord and Brother, and that the holy angels rejoice on my account. This I believe, though I have no especial feelings about it. I care not whether the pope and the sects believe this also or not; I will believe it, for God is true and His Word does not lie.

The disciples did not know this art, nor did they exercise this faith, else they would not have disputed about the words of Christ, nor would they have been perplexed at them, but they would have simply believed them. They should have known that what He says is true and will be accomplished. The blind man mentioned in our Gospel understood this art of believing much better. His eyes are totally blind, yet as soon as he heard the word: "Receive thy sight," he believed it, and obtained what he wished and believed. The simple word in his case referred also to something not yet accomplished, for the eyes of the blind were yet shut; but he believed the word and the deed of restoration to sight immediately followed according to his faith. Thus ought the disciples also to have believed. Though they could not comprehend how the sayings of Christ could be accomplished, they should have believed them at His Word. The Word simply requires faith.

To trust implicitly the Word of God and to waver not at all in regard to its statements, is taught us in the first part of our Gospel today. The pope

knows nothing of such faith, nor does he teach it. But you have learned it; keep it well fixed in your mind that a Christian heart is one which hears the Word of God concerning the forgiveness of sins and believes it without doubting, though it neither sees nor feels it. This will afterwards follow of itself. First true faith, then the experience and effects of faith with all its blessings. The others, the pope, Turks, Jews and all unbelievers, will then cry out until they are hoarse, but all in vain: Would that we had believed; who could have thought that this was true! They would now believe, but it is too late; they have postponed their faith too long.

Let us therefore never be offended at the Word of God, even if it seems strange, improbable or impossible; if God has spoken it, it must be fulfilled. Let us never look to the possibility of its execution, but only to the fact that God has so spoken. He is potent enough to bring His declarations to a fulfillment under all circumstances. Whoever doubts this, blasphemes God most wickedly. We must earnestly endeavor to avoid this sin of incredulity when God's Word speaks to us, even though we do not comprehend its meaning; for it will surely happen even as the Word declares. Thus we have the Word of God in Baptism, in the Lord's Supper, in the absolution and in the preaching; here God Himself speaks to us and pronounces us free from sin. This we must believe as an eternal truth, and never doubt it in the least.

In the second part of our Gospel, concerning the blind man by the wayside, the Evangelist teaches us the necessary art of begging in the presence of God; how we ought never to be afraid or ashamed to ask Him unceasingly for everything that we need. He who is bashful is a poor beggar. We must here lay aside false timidity, remembering that God loves to be importuned by us in prayer. He delights to bestow upon us blessings, and is pleased if we trust in Him and ask much at His hands. And we are surely much in need of His gifts; therefore we should ask of Him as readily as He is willing to give. If we would wait with our petitions until we are worthy of the blessings of God, we would never have an opportunity to ask anything of Him. Hence all shamefacedness should be laid aside, and we should open our mouth boldly in prayer, and say: Lord, here I am in great trouble of body and of soul; I need Thy assistance and comfort; refuse it not, but let me enjoy it according to Thy gracious promises.

The beggars by the wayside and in the alleys are well acquainted with the art of asking; necessity was their teacher. Yet people do not like to be

importuned in this manner, and frequently turn away such supplicants with angry words. God however loves such incessant suitors and importunate beggars, as we see one in our text.

The blind man heard the noise of the company passing by and inquired what it meant. When he learned that Jesus was there he immediately began to cry out: "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those who went before endeavored to silence him, but in vain; he persisted in his cry. Yea, the more they rebuke him the louder he calls.

He was a regular beggar, importunate and persevering, just such an one as God is pleased with. We ought therefore to imitate this example and come to Christ with our prayer, earnestly and perseveringly, saying: O Lord, we are poor, miserable sinners; forgive us our trespasses and bring us into Thy kingdom. Help us here and help us there, yea, help us everywhere 1 He who thus asks and unceasingly persists in his prayer does well; God is delighted with it, for he is not so easily annoyed as we men are. We are soon wearied by urgent prayers and become angry at him who persists in them; but He loves to be importuned and to be regarded as willing to give. Therefore we ought to pray to Him repeatedly and say: Lord, I come as a beggar before Thee to spread Thy honor abroad. Thou hast commanded us to call upon Thee, and hast promised to hear us and to grant us our prayer, for thus Thou art honored. Therefore, O Lord, take not into account my unworthiness, but the fact that I am in want of Thy help, and that Thou art the Helper of all sinners. I call upon Thee for Thy honor's sake, and Thou wilt not turn Thine ear away from me, etc.

Such a prayer, persevering and bold, is pleasing to God. As soon as the blind man begins with his prayer, the Lord calls him to His side, and all others had to make way. The blind man, on the other hand, is in no wise timid or ashamed, nor is he reluctant to pray on account of his unworthiness. The Lord asked him; "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" that He might manifest His readiness to help. He meant to say by this question: Ask what thou wilt and it shall be done unto thee. The blind man is not slow with his petition; he answers: "Lord, that I may receive my sight." Christ replied: "Receive thy sight." Short but earnest and effective was the prayer, and graciously was it answered. We must learn from this man how to pray, namely, boldly and faithfully, presenting all our troubles to Christ in the same faith that He will hear us and grant us our request.

In the papacy we had no confidence in our own prayer, and imagined that if others would not intercede for us we would not obtain anything. Never ought a Christian to think thus. As soon as afflictions come, hasten to the closet and fall upon thy knees and say: Lord, here I come in my distress; I must have Thy succor, though I am unworthy of it. Thou hast said: Call upon me in the time of trouble, therefore I pray; look down upon my suffering and misery and rescue me for Thy honor's sake. Thus we ought to importune God with our prayer, and doubt not in the least that He will hear us for Christ's sake, and give us what we need and is good for us. The promise in this is plain and sure: "Whatever ye shall ask in My name that shall be given unto you." Only we must not desist from our asking, but continue in it. The more we pray, the more will God be pleased with us; our begging does not weary Him. Yea, if our prayer is sufficiently earnest and confident He will give us in the self-same hour what we ask, though He might have otherwise postponed the fulfillment of our request; He heeds our anxious prayer. Thus I hope that the day of judgment is near at hand, and that it will not tarry long, because of the anxious prayers of the Christians who long for it with many sighs. The Lord Himself gives an instance of the effect of importunate prayer, Luke 18., where the widow urges her request so vehemently that the judge, who feared neither God nor man, could not withstand her any more, but said: I will help her that she may cease from troubling me. "And shall not God," continues Christ, "avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." That is: Prayer causes God to hasten what otherwise would be delayed.

The prayers of the Christians, if persisted in, have the effect to bring to pass what otherwise would be deferred, or would even not take place at all. This example must therefore teach us to become impudent beggars, who persist in their request and urgently press their cause, saying: Lord, it cannot be denied, I am a poor degraded sinner; I know full well that I have deserved, by my great and glaring disobedience, much greater penalty and suffering, but because I am full of sin and misery I come unto Thee, and according to Thy command and promises I pray that Thou wouldst be merciful unto me, and forgive me my sins and rescue me from my distress. Guide me by Thy Holy Spirit, and bestow upon me what I need to continue in the truth. Be also the defense of Thy Church and continue unto us Thy

Word. I cannot argue here that I am pious; the fact that I am needy suffices; Thou art kind and ready to give what is beneficial to me for soul and body.

If we pray thus, and continue in our supplication, God will surely answer us as Christ did the blind man in our Gospel: “What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee.” To pray and not to have faith in prayer, would be mocking God. Faith, however, rests entirely upon this one truth that God, for Christ’s sake, is merciful unto us, that He will hear, and protect and save us. May Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior, thus assist us! Amen.

Invocavit. Matt. 4:1-11.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward a hungered. And when the tempter came to Him, He said, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning Thee: and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord Thy God. Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them: and saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord Thy God, and Him only shalt Thou serve. Then the devil leaveth Him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him.

We learn from this Gospel how the Lord Jesus subsequently to His Baptism was tempted in a threefold manner, after having been without food forty days and forty nights in the wilderness. According to the account given of this occurrence by St. Luke, these temptations continued throughout the forty days, so that He was molested by each one for several days, and perhaps not in the same order in which Matthew mentions them.

This Gospel is exceedingly comprehensive, especially when applied to the entire Christian Church, which is also tried by hunger and persecution, by heresies and the kingdoms of the world, as can be plainly seen in all her

history. We will however at this time not enter into such an extensive consideration of the text, but simply learn from it a few practical lessons. The experience of Christ after His Baptism shall teach us, in the first place, how every Christian after he is baptized is enrolled in the army fighting against the crafty devil, who makes frequent attacks, and stirs up persecutions all the days of our life. If this bitter enemy does not succeed with his afflictions and temptations, to overcome Christians, he seeks to hang them upon the cross and to murder them as he did Christ.

This peril threatens all Christians. Nor ought we to expect anything else. If he did not spare Christ, but attacked Him so persistently, he will much less spare us, whom he knows to be weak and unprepared. We should therefore be ready to meet this danger when it comes, and learn of Christ how to repel the enemy. This however can only be done through faith in God and His Word. If we put on this armor and use it properly, we are secure against the devil and his attacks; but if we have it not, or are ignorant of its use, we are hopelessly lost, and will become a prey to our deadly enemy.

Every Christian should therefore earnestly read the Word of God and hear it preached, so that he may become well acquainted with it. Besides, we ought to pray incessantly to God to let His kingdom come unto us, to lead us not into temptation, but to deliver us from all evil.

We read in our Gospel that “Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness,” that is, the Holy Ghost brought Him thither. This record is made by the Evangelist to caution against all self-imposed service; for Christ did not go into the desert by His own will, nor for the purpose of spending His time there in worship and in a conflict with the devil, as many now attempt to do without any divine command whatever. This ought not to be done. No one should undertake to serve God in a peculiar way, unless he is convinced that God has called him to do so, either by His Word, or by means of men who have, according to God’s will, authority over us. He who does this without a proper call, as the monks and nuns do who run into convents, does not only not serve God, but acts in direct opposition to His will.

That Christ did not go into the wilderness of His own accord, but was led up by the Spirit, is a fact of the greatest importance and should be well

remembered. We should imitate this example, and never do anything through an impulse of our own feelings; but what we do must ever be done in obedience to the Word and command of God. Let us always first ascertain whether God orders us to do a thing, and when we are assured of this, then let us diligently do it, and do nothing without His Word.

The general duties and works of love need no new command; they are already laid down and ordered in the Ten Commandments. We are all enjoined of God to hear His Word, to love Him, to pray to Him, to be obedient to our parents, to love our neighbor, to shun all lasciviousness and to hold matrimony in high esteem. All this is God's will and institution; therefore no especial call of the Holy Spirit to enter matrimony, to become father or mother, is needed. Such matters have all been arranged and commanded of God. But we nowhere find a command or word of God, which would demand of us to run into cloisters for the purpose of serving God, or to avoid eating meat, eggs or butter during the Lenten season, or to sing no Hallelujah in that time; and therefore all such observances are no true service of God.

We will now consider the temptations in their order. The first one takes place when the devil, seeing that Christ was an hungered, tells Him: "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." This would seem to be no severe temptation. How could it have been wrong for Christ to make bread out of stones? Did He not often perform greater miracles? True; but Christ did not comply with the will of the devil, because He knew well what the meaning of such language was. The devil did not care to have a miracle performed, but, as Christ indicates in His answer, he desired to rob the Lord of His faith and confidence in the mercy of God, and to implant into His heart the thought: God has forgotten and forsaken Thee; He will not even give Thee a piece of bread, and will let Thee die of hunger. Hence the Lord replies: Nonsense, devil! it is written: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

The purport of the devil's insinuation is, to make the care for daily bread the chief concern in life, to the utter neglect of the Word of God. This perverseness prevails in our day, and the devil is ever busy putting into the hearts of men such thoughts as these: If we are children of God He cannot be offended at us. Let us therefore keep on hoarding up our treasures, and

engage with our whole energy in worldly pursuits; let us give nobody anything of what we have, but keep all for ourselves; this cannot be amiss nor a sin. God would be an unmerciful and unkind Father, if He would not allow us to enjoy our bread and to gather it. Such reasoning causes many a farmer and tradesman and mechanic to become miserly hypocrites; they continue in their avaricious dealings, supposing that God will not be displeased with their conduct, since they are engaged in securing their daily bread and support. Each one excuses himself with the thought that he must provide for his wife and children, etc.

The devil attempts to cover the wrong with the statement: "Thou art the Son of God." He means to say: It is impossible for Thee to sin or to make a mistake. The world is everywhere so disposed that it does not care for the Word, if it only has bread and raiment. Hence this temptation to make the Word of no account, and to urge people to strive after their bread with such avidity that everything else is forgotten, is the most common and the most successful.

One must therefore be ready to withstand such temptation and to say: Devil, thou shalt not deceive me nor steal the Word of God away from me. I would rather lose my bread, and die of hunger, than to be in want of the Word of God. For it is better that the body, which is nourished by the bread, should perish, than that the soul should be eternally lost. The devil earnestly endeavors to prevent such determination; waylays us with his afflictions and strenuously labors to make us forgetful of the Word of God, and careful only for our bellies, under the specious pretense that God our Father desires us to have and to enjoy food and raiment.

An effective weapon against this temptation is the knowledge of the fact, which Christ here mentions, that there are two kinds of bread. The first and best bread, which comes from heaven, is the Word of God. The other and inferior is our daily bread; this grows for us on earth. If I am well supplied with the former, with the good bread of heaven, and firmly adhere to it, my daily bread shall not be wanting as long as I am in need of it; sooner would stones turn into bread. They, however, who have discarded the heavenly food and busy themselves only for temporal supplies, when they have their fill lie down and die. Their money and farms and goods they cannot eat, but must leave them all behind, while they will endure everlasting hunger. It should not be thus. If therefore the devil torments us with persecutions and

want, with hunger and sorrow, we should suffer patiently and fast as Christ did, because it is God's will; but never should we lose our confidence and faith in Him. Then will the blessed angels come to set the tables for us, as we read in the conclusion of our Gospel.

Thus we learn from this first temptation to esteem the Word of God most highly, to believe in it, and to rely on it in times of want and adversity, when thoughts are apt to arise as if God were offended and determined to help us no more. Amid such trials we can find no consolation except in the Word of God. There we have the true bread and nourishment. "He who eateth of this bread," that is, whoever believeth the Word, "has eternal life in Him." Let us never forget this. On the other hand, the food which this world gives, and after which men are so greedy, is of short duration, and vanishes with death. Eternal hunger will follow if man does not while in this world provide himself through faith with that imperishable food, the Word of God.

The other temptation was this: "The devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto Him: If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee." That is; because Thou art the Son of God no evil can befall Thee, for the angels will be sent forth to prevent it.

This is a severe and spiritual temptation of faith, which is here assaulted from another direction than the one already considered. If the devil cannot produce despondency by presenting to us our sins and the wrath of God, he tries his seductive arts in making us reckless, proud and presumptuous. The devil comes here with the challenge: If Thou desirest to dispute with me from the Word of God, well and good, I am ready! I will show Thee a declaration from this Word, hear it: "He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee;" they must construct a ladder for Thee, "and bear Thee up in their hands." Leap down then; let us see whether Thou hast confidence in this promise of God!

We must regard Christ in this connection as a man, who has His divinity concealed in His humanity. As He hangs upon the cross, a man in reality, full of infirmity, sorrowing and crying for help and release, so we also see Him here, a real man with the infirmities attending the human nature. Hence the devil thought he could persuade Christ to tempt God by the performance of a useless miracle. For this purpose he cites the 91. Psalm, as

a proof of the propriety of his demand; but he omits the most important expression, "*in viis tuis*, the Lord shall keep Thee in all Thy ways." The knave thought he could with this quotation perplex Christ, and induce Him to do what He was not commanded. For Christ is now in the wilderness not to perform miracles, but in a state of humiliation, as a man destined to suffer. The devil, in view of this feat, proposes to seduce Christ from His path of duty, to the performance of an unnecessary miracle. But Christ understands the scheme and says: "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." He tells him: Here are steps and stairways, wherefore it is entirely unnecessary that I should leap down. Since I can descend by means of the stairs, it would be wrong to put myself in danger, without necessity and without the command of God. We must here heed this important lesson, that he who departs from the ordinary way of his calling and attempts to do something new and peculiar, without having the command of God to do so tempts God. Monks and nuns act thus when they, of their own accord, select for themselves a peculiar mode of living, saying that Christ had ordered them to do so when He says: "Leave all and follow me." Thus it would appear that they had Scripture in their favor; but we see in our Gospel that the devil is also versed in the Scriptures, and thus deceives people. The great defect in his quotations is that he does not give them entire, but only so much as suits his purpose; as to the remainder, he is silent and rejects it.

The Anabaptists do the same thing; they quote much Scripture to prove that we ought not to rely upon anything created. Baptism, they say, is a created thing, for it is water merely; therefore we dare not have faith in it nor any confidence whatever. They will not believe that the grace of God is in Baptism, unless they can touch it with their fists. They have the Scriptures, but the mischief is that they do not use them properly. If the Word of God did not state distinctly: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," it would of course be false to look for the grace of God in Baptism. The Word of God is explicit in this when it declares: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Faith and Baptism, the word and the water, belong together and dare not be separated. This, however, these blind people cannot perceive.

Christ answers the devil in regard to his quotation from the Scriptures: I am well aware that the angels of God will be my companions and that they

will defend and protect me as long as I follow the way which God has marked out for me. When parents fulfill their duties, when man-servants or maid-servants perform their prescribed labors, God will defend them all from threatening danger through His holy angels. But if they go astray there will be no angels there to protect them; the devil can then easily break their necks any hour of the day, as the providence of God often permits; and it is just right for them, too; why did they tempt God and go upon their own, self-chosen pathway?

No one can understand this temptation who has not experienced it. As the first tends to desperation, so this leads to fool-hardiness and to deeds which have no word or command of God in their favor. A Christian must endeavor to avoid these two extremes; he ought not to despair, nor should he be recklessly venturesome, but should cling under all circumstances, in full confidence and faith, to the Word and promises of God. The holy angels will then be with us, otherwise not.

The third temptation is a mere *truditio humana*, exceedingly gross and palpable. The devil attempts to lead into idolatry by offering honor and temporal power. This temptation gains much strength from the fact that external holiness is so much admired by our reason, and glitters much more enchantingly than simply obedience to the Word of God. The pope regards matrimony as unholy; also the bringing up of children and their instruction in the duties of obedience and industry; whilst he is very much delighted, and considers it a most saintly and meritorious deed, if one puts on a gray old coat and hood, if he lives different from other people and refrains from eating meat on Friday, if he fasts and makes pilgrimages, etc. These practices throw a halo of sanctity around one's head, so that kings and emperors bow before it with reverence.

Such forced piety and self-made sanctity are the glory of the pope. He and his followers wish to be peculiar; to be like other people would be too common for them. Therefore they greatly praise him who runs into a cloister to become a monk and, as they say, an especial servant of God, seeking neither gold nor possessions in his absolute seclusion from the world. Such praises are bestowed upon a monkish life, although they are entirely undeserved, as everybody knows.

In short, this is a most fiendish temptation; it is a false holiness, and does in no wise serve God, whom only, as Christ here says, we ought to serve. If we do not serve God alone we certainly serve the devil, who may indeed often reward, in the manner proposed by him to Christ, with luxury and ease, with rich incomes and great dominion.

If we desire to serve God we must do His will as revealed in His Word. If we are children we must honor father and mother; if servants, we must be obedient and faithful to our masters; if master or mistress, we ought not to offend our domestics in word or deed, but should endeavor to do what is comely and promotive of piety. Thus will we serve God and not men. His Word demands all this of us; and if the world should call this a service of masters, of parents or of children, of neighbors or of friends, it matters not; it is nevertheless a true service of God. He Himself has said: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

The devil has taught the pope to disregard this command and to attribute special holiness to a gray coat, to the abstinence from butter and meat, and to the eating of oil and herrings during the season of Lent. God has given no such ordinances. Such things have nothing to do with true piety, just as little as a play-house of children could be called a palace. We cannot serve God except by obedience to His Word. Where this is wanting with its demands, we do that which is our own invention, and oppose the will of God. Hence we cannot hope for a reward from God, He says unto us: I did not tell you to do these things; some devil must have incited you, let him reward you. I the Lord have commanded you to love and obey your parents and superiors and to do good to your neighbors; instead of that you do what I have not ordained, and thus rebel against my regulations. ' This I will not regard as serving me.

The pope and his followers are therefore simply idolaters and servants of the devil. They not only despise the Word, but also persecute it, while they claim to be holy on account of their observances, their hoods and tonsures, their fastings and masses, and similar arrangements. Nor will they be corrected in this. The devil has shown and promised them the kingdom of this world, therefore they mock at us and our worship. We are regarded as beggars and outcasts, while they greatly exalt themselves and their church customs, from which they derive much honor, wealth and power, so that the

pope has become a mightier lord than kings and emperors. From this it is evident how the devil has taken hold of him with this temptation.

We ought always to meet the devil's temptations as Christ did, with the ready and firm response: "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." That is, we should look only to God's Word for instruction, and obeying it we will institute no other worship than that which it teaches. Since we may at all times meet with these three temptations, we should learn from the Word of God how to defend ourselves against them. We must see to it that the care for our daily bread does not rob us of our faith; that we do not become indifferent to our safety by a false hope of security; and finally, that neither money nor wealth may seduce us from the true worship of God, but that we may remain firm in our faith and in the fear of the Lord. May Christ our Savior, who in our behalf endured these temptations and prevailed against them, give us also strength and ability through Him to overcome them, and to obtain eternal life. Amen.

Reminiscere. Matt. 15:21-28.

Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshiped Him, saying, Lord, help me. But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

This is a precious Gospel. It has been assigned to this Sunday, as others were, because it contains an account of the casting out of a devil. The intention was thus to admonish people to become pious, and to confess their sins. But it is popish piety, poor and false, that is put off all the year until this Sunday is reached, and that consists in miserable fastings and forced confessions which are not commanded.

This Gospel means no such farce and child's play. It contains an important and difficult lesson, showing how faith, in agony and adversity, pleads its cause before God, from which we should learn not to be deterred by any obstacle from coming to Him with our cries and petitions, even if He Himself should at first say nay. This struggle we experience particularly in the perils of death, the devil being busy to stir up within us terrible thoughts, as if God our Lord had rejected and forsaken us. Dark and lowering clouds then hang over us, so that the bright sun with its rays is totally obscured, and awful night overwhelms us with multiplied distress.

This struggle is portrayed in the woman of our text. The person and all attending circumstances are of the most unpromising kind. The first unfavorable circumstance is the fact that the woman is of heathen birth, no child of Abraham, nor of his lineage; and therefore, being a stranger, she has no right to ask any favors here. This she knew, and it would have been no wonder if this fact had prevented her coming. She might easily have been led to think: Why shall I go, and what shall I ask? It is all in vain. I am a heathen and foreign woman; He is a Jew, and one sent unto the Jews.

I very much doubt whether we would overcome such obstacles as this; we would succumb to them, and give up our prayer. It is no trifling matter when conscience appears with its charges and tells us: What are you about? You have not the right to pray, as you are not Christ's disciple; let Peter and Paul pray to God; these He will hear, but not you. You have no faith; perhaps you are not one of the elect, and surely unworthy to come before God with your petitions. With thoughts like these the devil can bring us to despair; for indeed the obstacles are great.

When thus perplexed let us look for encouragement upon this woman, and learn to conduct ourselves as she did. The difficulties in the way do not appall her; she keeps only in view the object of her coming, and forgets that she is a heathen and He a Jew. Her confidence and hope in Christ are so great that she never doubts His condescension. Her faith cancels the fact that she is a heathen. One without faith would never have acted thus, but would have concluded: It is of no use to present my request before Him; I am in the clutches of the devil beyond all hope; let His own people come to Him; them will He hear, but not me. Whoever has no faith is utterly unable to pray. The woman is not vexed with doubts as to her privilege of coming to Christ: she does not spend the time in debating the question, whether she dare come or not; she simply starts upon her way and comes.

It is surely a severe and dangerous affliction when the devil prompts the heart to despair of the mercy of God, to refuse to pray to Him, yea, rather to be ready to curse Him, and to think that all is lost and damnation sure. Such wicked thoughts deter an inexperienced heart from prayer and throw it into despondency.

This story is therefore of great value for us, and written on our account, so that we might know how to meet the enemy when he comes and says:

“You are no Christian, your prayer is in vain.” Mind not such insinuations, but answer boldly: I care not who I am. I know that I am a sinner, but I also know that Christ my Lord is holy, ever just and merciful. Therefore I will call unto Him without hesitation and think of nothing besides; I have no time to debate, whether I am one of the chosen or not. This much I know: I need help, and on that account I come, humbly seeking it.

If we are thus disposed in mind, we follow the example of our Gospel aright. The woman was a heathen, and, aware of that, she had to conclude that she did not belong to the chosen people; she swallows, however, contentedly this big and bitter morsel, still praying unto Christ with much earnestness. Go and do likewise; say: O Lord, here I come, in want of everything. Give me what I need through Thy Son, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Such a struggle of faith, and wonderful exhibition of its nature, is manifested in this heathen woman.

We are told that she cried out: “O Lord, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” This was an humble and reverential appeal, full of earnestness and faith. She confesses in these words her faith in Christ as the Savior of the world, whom God has sent. She reminds Him of His office and relates to Him her sorrow: “My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.” Christ heard her complaint, but answered not a word. This was the second rebuff for her, which was plainly intended to remind her that she was a Gentile and not entitled to a portion of the heritage of the people of God. She follows Christ with her request, but He is silent and pays no attention to her. Surely, a reception well calculated to shake the strongest confidence. Why should she not have thought: I was mistaken; He does not help, nor is He merciful unto all, as I supposed? I see now that He hears but a favored few, and looks not to the existing misery of the suppliants coming to Him. But the poor woman is not yet hopeless of success. See what happened next.

The disciples, weary of her entreaties, are inclined to mercy sooner than Christ. They regard His behavior as harsh and relentless, wherefore they begin to interfere in behalf of the woman: Lord, Thou seest how meekly and earnestly she supplicates Thee; hear her, and grant her prayer, else she will not desist from it. Indeed, a valuable example to show us how we ought to be instant in prayer.

Taulerus in his writings remarks that we should desist from our prayer. By this he means that when we have prayed often and earnestly we may, for a time, leave off with our petitions, having full faith however that God has heard our prayer and will in the proper season grant it. But it would certainly be wrong to teach people to refrain from prayer; this neglect comes of itself too soon and too often. This example also instructs us not to leave off with our prayer, but to continue in it, without considering whether we are good or bad, deserving or not. We need help and cannot postpone our petition. Every obstacle thrown in the way of our supplication should only prove an incentive to a still more earnest and incessant continuance in it.

Now comes the third trial for the woman, when Christ says: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." With these words He also rebukes the disciples; for He will neither hear them nor the woman. She might now have thought: He is indeed inexorable, and listens neither to those in want nor to those who intercede in their behalf. And, in fact, we nowhere else find Christ resisting so persistency, as here. But the woman is not dismayed; she clings to Him with pertinacity, and is not checked in her prayer even by this third repulse.

When her clamor and the intercession of others seem to be of no avail, she even comes into the house, as St. Mark relates. An impudent woman, forsooth! She runs after Christ in the streets with her cry, and when He enters the house to escape her notice, she follows Him and casts herself at His feet. But all this is written for our instruction and consolation, that we should know that Christ is well pleased with such obstinate persistence in prayer.

Still, the Lord is not yet ready to yield, as she desires. He answers the woman: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." If Christ had spoken such words to me, I would have turned and left Him, thinking it useless to ask Him any more, since He seems determined not to grant the request. For, indeed, it was a most severe saying, and enough to crush the poor woman. He tells her that she is a heathen and therefore no heir, and then in addition calls her a dog. This is worse than if He had simply called her a heathen, and is equivalent to the declaration: Thou art a child of the devil in every respect; begone, I will have nothing to do with thee. Indeed, a most appalling trial! If St. Peter or St. Paul spake such a

word to me, I would be frightened to death. What can it mean, that Christ Himself thus speaks to the woman?

Just here we notice the beauty and excellence of this example; for we learn from it the mighty strength of faith. Faith takes hold of Christ's words, even when they sound harshly, and changes them into soothing expressions of consolation. The woman replies to this harsh saying: Thou callest me a dog; I will not gainsay it; take me as a dog, and treat me as one, if it so pleases Thee. Give the bread to the children, and seat them at the table; I ask no such favor; only permit me to pick up under the table the crumbs which the children have dropped, and which they do not miss, and I will be content. She thus overcomes Christ with His own words, and by accepting the position of a dog she obtains the privileges of a child. What can He now see, the merciful, compassionate Jesus? Forced by His own words, He yields. O, that we would force Him in a similar way; He is ever willing that it should be done!

This most glorious and peculiar struggle of faith is narrated to us that it might be a bright example for all. Never should we turn from the Lord, though He calls us dogs or heathens. Dogs must have masters and food, and the heathens must have a God.

The Lord is overcome by this untiring supplication and unwavering faith. He answers: woman, all these refusals and rebuffs thou hast successfully sustained and repelled; it shall now be unto thee as thou desirest. Christ is Himself astonished at this example of faith. He had seen how easily the Jews were offended, when He told them they must partake of His flesh; but this woman, in her faith, clings to the hope that He is the Savior and Helper, in whom she firmly trusts.

Here we find the reason why Christ assumed the appearance of harshness towards the woman. His repulsive treatment of her did not proceed from an unfriendly disposition towards the Gentiles, but it was His purpose to test and make manifest the faith of this woman, so that the Jews, who were the children of His kingdom, might learn from her, a heathen, how to believe in Him, and what confidence they should have in Him. He is so well pleased with the whole conduct of the woman that He can no longer withhold His mercy and kindness, but tells her: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." She asked but the favors extended

to dogs; He gives her much more. He not only cures her daughter, but offers to grant unto her whatever she may ask, and thus ranks her among the seed of Abraham. Her faith is the source of all her blessings; through faith she is no more a dog or a heathen, but a holy woman and a beloved child. Such example teaches us that we should continue steadfast in our supplication, though God may for a long time defer His acquiescence in our demands, firmly believing that at the proper time, and in the proper manner, He will pronounce His yea to our prayer. All that is required is not to become weary nor hopeless in our petitions, but to trust faithfully in Him and His providence. Other examples teach us the same lesson. Joseph continued in his prayer to God for help thirteen entire years; yet, the more he prayed the worse his condition seemed to become. Christians have the same experience in our times. They come unto God with their prayer for assistance, yet, after a long time has elapsed, there is still no change for the better. On the contrary, they experience with Joseph that affairs become worse and worse. If Joseph had obtained an immediate response to his prayer, Jacob his father would have been saved much anxiety, but Joseph himself would have remained a simple shepherd. By the long continued delay of the fulfillment of Joseph's prayer it came to pass that God made him ruler over all Egypt, so that he became a great blessing, not only during the seven years of famine, but also in the government of the State and the Church. Egypt and the surrounding countries were thus benefited.

God pursues the same course with us. He may for a long time refuse to hear our prayer, or may answer with a nay; but if we faithfully persist in our request He will finally drop the no and make it yes. His word cannot lie: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you."

Our reason cannot understand such a delay and is offended at it; it expects an immediate fulfillment of the request. But it is wrong to be thus offended. We must not be dismayed if God answers not according to our wishes, even if one year, or two or three years pass by ere they are fulfilled. Above all things we must see to it that hope and faith in His promises are not lost from our hearts; in the end He gives us much more than we had ever dared to ask. This was the experience of the woman; yea, if she had asked for still more than she did, He would also in the end have granted it.

God teaches us that it is not well, at all times, immediately to grant us our request. He does this in times of imminent peril. If we fall into the

water, or are in battle, He does not tarry with His help, but straightway comes to our relief: But wherever a delay is practicable, it is the will of God that we should learn to wait and to exercise our faith in prayer, as the prophet Habakkuk says: "Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

Thus the Lord tarries at the present day, and permits the pope and the infidels to rage against us. We cry unto Him and lament, but He heeds not our prayer and permits us to be downtrodden as though we had no God. But it will not always be thus. Let us therefore entertain no doubts; Christ our Lord, and God His Father in heaven, mean to say yes to our prayer in the end. This we believe most assuredly, in spite of all delay and the devil's maliciousness.

God will surely be merciful unto His Church, and rescue her from her enemies when she crieth unto Him. He has already determined upon this, for He says: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you." Why then should we doubt or fear? We ought firmly to believe that God will answer our prayer favorably, in spite of our unworthiness, if we but faithfully continue to implore Him.

Thus we see that this narrative presents a most excellent example of true faith, how it must be applied and how it will finally triumph over all adversities. The woman does not permit even Christ Himself to deprive her of the belief that He would hear and help her.

This occurrence is also a source of great consolation to us when we are disturbed by the thought of our wickedness and unworthiness, which indeed will trouble us during our whole life, often to the detriment of our faith. If Christ had looked more upon unworthiness and merit than upon the great misery of the woman, He would not have helped her; but His compassion prompted Him to afford relief. He will be merciful and ready to help us if we but come unto Him with our sorrows, and trust in Him with a believing heart. May God in mercy strengthen us, that we may be able to do this, – that we may depend entirely upon His word and promises, and thus through faith in Christ be saved for evermore! Amen.

Oculi. Luke 11:14-28

And He was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils. And others, tempting Him, sought of Him a sign from heaven. But He, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast but devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. And it came to pass, as He spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto Him, Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked. But He said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it.

Again we have presented for our consideration a Gospel which treats of the casting out of a devil. The same motive which led to the selection of the Gospel for last Sunday, is apparent in selecting that for today; namely, to

exhort people in this, season of Lent to cast out the devil through sorrow, penitence and confession of sins, so that thus an amendment of life may be wrought. But it matters not whether we read this Gospel today or tomorrow, in summer or during Lent; it will ever be exceedingly valuable, because it exhibits to us a deed of our Lord and Savior, which not only occurred at that time, but the effects of which shall continue to the end of the world, as long as His kingdom is on earth. A similar deed was presented to our notice by the Gospel of last Sunday. Today we are also told what people thought of it, and this affords us an occasion to learn a very important lesson. First, however, we will dwell upon the deed itself.

We are to learn from this report of the casting out of a devil the most consoling truth that Christ is the Lord over the devil and his realm; and, further, that this work, then begun in the body, did not terminate, but still continues in the Church of Christ, and will continue until the judgment day. For the accomplishment of this work Christ has instituted the necessary means; namely, Holy Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Word and Absolution, also other offices pertaining to the ministry, whereby the devil is to be cast out from the people, so that they may become free from his thralldom and that his kingdom may be destroyed. For it is plainly written in this respect: *Verbum meum non redibit vacuum* – My Word shall not return void. As the rain which falls upon dry land produces vegetation and blossoms, thus does the Word of God, most assuredly, produce fruit in some hearts. The Holy Spirit is connected with the Word to illumine, incite and purify the hearts, that they may be set free from the tyranny and oppression of the devil.

This transaction is not visible to the outward eyes, as it was when Christ cast out the devil; it may be entirely imperceptible to the world, which is indeed not worthy to see the least spark of divine light and power, and which is blind, reviles, abuses and defames that which is good, as it did even here in the presence of Christ. We, however, who have and believe the Word, ought to perceive and know this truth which is so full of comfort, that God has ordained among us the means whereby we can and must continually cast out devils.

Every little child born into the world belongs to the kingdom of the devil, where he is lord and exercises his authority on account of sin. Therefore we must bring the little ones to holy Baptism, according to Christ's command, that they may be regenerated into the kingdom of God,

as the Lord Himself says, John 3.; then will the devil be cast out and leave them. When the child is baptized into the death of Christ, God bestows upon it His mercy. Thus, also, when a poor distressed conscience, which the devil has caught in his meshes unawares, comes to me for consolation and instruction, I and all Christians have the authority, by Christ's command, to console and cheer the sorrowing brother, by assuring him of the mercy of God through the death of Christ. Then the devil must withdraw; not, indeed, because I a poor miserable sinner have ordered him to do so, but on account of the word of absolution, which Christ had given us upon earth. Again, when our conscience is terrified and timid, so that doubts arise whether God will be merciful and forgive us our sins, we have the Lord's Supper, which Christ Himself instituted as a consolation most sure; because if we partake of His body and blood, we can have no longer any ground to doubt that He gave His body into death for our sins and that His blood was shed for their remission. Where there is such faith and assurance the devil must clear the field; his occupation there is gone.

Thus must the Church of Christ continually engage in the work of expelling the devil. Her warfare with the wicked old serpent, who shows his fangs with a bitter determination to establish his dominion, is a perpetual one. Of these deeds Christ speaks when He says, John 14: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father."

The reason of this is that the Christian Church extends her offices much farther than Christ did. He labored within the narrow limits of a portion of Judea, and converted but few, since He preached only a little over three years. The Church, however, under the guidance and protection of her Head and Master, Jesus Christ, who sitteth at the right hand of God, continually pursues the work of evangelizing the world. She preaches the Gospel, administers the sacraments, rebukes the devil unceasingly on account of his wickedness, and casts him out in various places, even from her own domain; for we are not yet entirely rid of him, and must be very vigilant against his wily movements.

Such treatment chagrins the devil very much.

And as we cast him out by preaching and the holy sacraments, if he does not succeed in regaining his position he excites persecutions to drive us

from the field. Thus it has ever been, and ever will be until the end of time. Christ Himself experienced this; He could not endure the devil, and drove him out wherever He was asked to do so. Hence the devil had a terrible grudge against Jesus, and by means of the Jews nailed Him on the cross and drove Him out of the world. But the devil was routed after all.

Christ did not only cast the devil out of this poor man in our Gospel, but, as we read in the first epistle of St. John, chap. 3: "He came to destroy the works of the devil," that is, to take away from Satan the power over those who believe in Christ. They, however, who do not accept Jesus, remain under the dominion of the devil, and must finally perish as did the Jews; there is no escape from this fate. The faithful, on the other hand, shall be secure; yea they cast the devil out through the Word, and will on the day of judgment sit with Christ as judges over the devil and all the wicked.

You all know that in the papacy the devil has been very successful in exalting his power to a high degree, so that the Word and Sacraments, which were yet spared them through the mercy of God, were not correctly understood. No one can deny this. Yet even in the popish church the devil had to yield to the Word, and was cast out by holy Baptism; for the promises of God cannot be annulled. The Holy Ghost does not refuse to convey blessings by the Word, on account of the faithlessness and wickedness of those who preach it or administer the Sacraments.

We have sufficient reason, then, heartily to thank God for such abundant grace, and should not complain if now and then the devil annoys us. He is very much out of sorts that we poor sinners should have the ability, by means of the Word, to compel him to move his quarters; for he is a very proud and self-important spirit. He proposes therefore to take full vengeance upon us, and he sets us with persecutions and afflictions. These we should endure patiently, since we know that we can not only cast him out, but that we shall also be his judges to condemn him forever into the abyss of hell.

From such deeds we should learn to esteem highly the Word of God and the holy Sacraments, and not speak of them so disrespectfully as the philosophers commonly do. If we judge the sacraments merely by our sight, it is true, we can see in them only external signs. Thus the Word is also an external thing, which we hear with our ears and read in the Scriptures; and

the Christians are bodily, visible men, but on that account they are not to be despised. If a Christian uses the Word according to the command of Christ, he has the power to drive the devil before him on every occasion.

The humble appearance of the Word and Sacraments ought not to offend us, but should be for us a source of thanksgiving to God for His merciful condescension in giving us by such humble means the greatest of divine blessings. We men are in the conflict with Satan weak as a straw, so that, if he could bring all his power to bear upon us, we would surely have to perish. But what does God do in our behalf? He lights up this wavering little straw by means of His Word, the fire divine, and prepares such a bright light and luster in the world that the devil is confounded and affrighted; he is compelled to leave his hiding places and to remove his habitation. Hence the apostle Paul calls the Gospel a divine power, through which men are saved; a power of God which rescues from sin and death, giving in return justification and life, bringing us from hell into heaven, from the kingdom of the devil into the kingdom of God.

We Christians should be well acquainted with this fact and praise God for it; we should esteem His Word and Sacraments as our highest treasure and blessing. The unbelievers however are not worthy to perceive such glorious majesty and power of the Word of God, as it is well said; *Tooatur impius, ne videat gloriam Dei*, “The wicked man must be removed that he cannot see the glory of God;” or as Isaiah says concerning the Jews: “Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.” We have indeed great reason to thank God for the knowledge and experience of the glory and majesty of His Word, and should heartily rejoice and be comforted that we poor beggars and sinners have such a power at our command, before which the devil cannot stand.

Thus the work of casting out the devil still continues among the Christians; the deaf hear and the dumb begin to speak, though not in an external manner. For surely, it is a mightier work to drive the devil from the heart than merely to expel him from the body. The heart of man is his strongest fortress. Christ however drives him also out of the body, that we may realize His power, seeing it with our eyes, and that we might firmly believe that He will also, by the Word and Absolution, by Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, though they be humble means, drive out the devil effectually from the heart, no matter how well he may have fortified himself there.

Such gracious gifts God has bestowed upon us. We ought to use them earnestly and well, with gratitude and assurance, against the devil, that we may drive him from his stronghold in the hearts of men. He may persecute us as to the body on this account, but that matters not; when the day of judgment comes he will be expelled from his power forever. This is the first lesson of the text, for which, rejoicing in the comfort, we ought to be duly thankful to God.

The Gospel continues to relate what that saintly virgin, the world, thought of this deed of Christ. There were three kinds of spectators there. The first class, consisting of the common people, was the most devout. They are astonished at this deed of Christ, and, undoubtedly, praised God for what they saw. But the number of those whose eyes are opened, who perceive the glory and might of the Word, is very small; they regard its effect as wonderful, and do not cease to praise the Word of God, which converts the people and deprives the devil of his power. They, therefore, never weary of hearing the Word preached to them.

The other two classes of beholders have their hearts hardened. With open eyes they do not perceive that it must be a divine power which quickly healed the man who had been deaf and dumb, so that he could hear and speak like other men, yea, a power which made the man who had been raving and mad, peaceable and quiet. These people are so blind, foolish and wicked that they ascribe this merciful deed of Christ, which they had witnessed, to the devil.

They might have been amazed and could have said: He casteth out the devils, therefore it may be that He possesses some especial influence, or a peculiar gift of God. This, however, they do not say, but with effrontery assert that God could have nothing to do with this deed, that the devil must be in Christ, and that the whole occurrence was only trickery and deception. They denied that it was a miracle of God; if it was one at all, they think, the devil must have wrought it. So blind and covered were their eyes, so hardened were their hearts, that they do not see the finger of God in this deed, and even venture to, say that it is the work of the devil, such as conjurers may perform.

In this their wicked assertion and horrible blasphemy, they are so bold that they call the devil by a very disreputable name, Beelzebub, which

means a bumblebee or a fly. They speak scornfully of the devil, as if they were great saints, full of the Holy Ghost, and the devil, compared with them, were like a bumblebee. Paul, the mighty apostle, does not thus disdainfully speak of him, but calls him a prince, the god of this world. But these big saints imagine that if they speak contemptuously of the devil they represent his casting out by Christ as an insignificant performance. They mean to say: This deed is not worthy of astonishment, for the devil can easily cast out another devil.

They cannot deny the deed itself, so they intentionally disparage it, and forget that they themselves are possessed of a thousand devils, since they are blasphemers, murderers, liars, seducers and in every way the most pliant tools of the devil, and all this because they act as though they had nothing to fear of him.

It is not otherwise in our day. The blessed Gospel, God be praised, is again preached, pure and true, in all decency and order. We rejoice that some pious souls receive this Gospel with alacrity and gladness, and are amazed at the mercy and compassion of God, giving thanks unto Him with all their hearts. Again, there are many who exert themselves to the utmost to persecute and overthrow it. Our opponents confess that our preaching rests upon the Holy Scriptures, that the Sacrament of the Altar should be received in both forms, bread and wine; also that Christ did not forbid to marry, nor to eat certain food; and yet they condemn our teachings as a damnable heresy. It would be no wonder if on account of such wickedness the sun would lose its light, and if these blasphemers were swallowed up by an earthquake. But they are totally indifferent, reckless and secure, as if they were the especial favorites of God; much less do they fear the devil, as do the Christians. We learn from experience that the devil may lead even the just into sin, and retard the work of God. Hence the Christians do not call him Beelzebub, a bumblebee, but, with St. Paul, a prince and god of this world.

We know well enough how strong he is, and how he holds with a tenacious grasp a person once given to error and heresy, so that it requires repeated instruction and exhortation to rescue such an one from the captivity of the devil. Thus also when he has allured a person into fornication or adultery, into avarice, wrath, hatred, envy and other crimes, I am sure he holds his victims as in a vice. If one cord or chain does not

suffice he takes a hundred more, so that there is no possibility of escape by one's own strength.

Hence the Christians will never despise the devil, as the self-righteous saints do who call him a bumblebee, but they know him as "a mighty lord and prince and god of this world," who can lead people into sin and shame, into despair and anguish, into sorrow and every kind of distress, yea, who would slay us if God permitted it. The pope and his crowd neither understand nor believe this, although they see and experience it repeatedly.

The Pharisees, who blaspheme Christ and His deed so vilely, are seven times more violently and dangerously possessed of the devil than this poor man, since they, like our Papists, not only misapprehend the Word, but also defame and persecute it in the most devilish manner. And yet they are as unconcerned as if their actions were all well and good.

It must so happen, if the devil is to be cast out from among us, and the Gospel is to be preached, that some will "wonder," while others will regard our doctrine as false and dangerous, and therefore abuse it as a heresy and doctrine of the devil. But this shall not offend us nor stay our work. We will not deny that it is painful when the Papists self-conceitedly slander and blaspheme, as if the devil were to be feared no more than a bumblebee. The Lord Himself met with the same reproach when He performed this great miracle and cast out the devil "with the finger of God;" they talked as though it were as easy to cast out devils as it is to drive off a bumblebee which flies about our head; and asserted that Satan himself assisted in the work. This is one class of the unbelieving witnesses of the work of God, who, instead of praising, blaspheme Him.

The third kind of spectators consists of those who make it a condition of their faith to see a sign from heaven. They are not far removed from the others in their wickedness, only they are not so bold in their assertions. They seek a sign while they have one already; they see it too, but they do not regard it as a true heavenly sign, and would have the Lord to show them one in the heavens; perhaps, that He should make for them a new moon, new stars and the like.

Wise fellows indeed, who desire to instruct the Lord our God as to the signs which He should show! It would tickle them amazingly if the Lord would assume the character of a juggler, and would exhibit to them some

extraordinary feats of magic, as if the Lord our God had nothing else to do but to satisfy their curiosity.

Such men are plenty in our day, especially among the great and honored ones of this world. It is a common saying with the learned and the mighty: What, shall we credit the preaching of these poor beggars – of these recusant monks and perfidious priests? If the pope, the emperor, the king or princes would promulgate or accept this doctrine, then would we listen to it. These men would also prescribe to God the routine of His duties, how His affairs might be managed much more prudently than they now are, and how He ought to send them such preachers as they would like to have. Lay your plans, noble lords – and God will do as He pleases.

Nor is it much better among us, who claim to be adherents of the Gospel, evangelical Christians. In cities and in the country people undertake to dictate to their preachers what they should preach and what would be acceptable to the hearers. And when a preacher, true to his office, rebukes the prevailing vices, plainly and fearlessly, so that every one can understand what and whom he means, though no names are mentioned, they scream with all their might that such preaching is improper and seditious, and ought to be suppressed by the government; that the Gospel ought to be preached without rebuking and publicly disgracing people. As if it were a defamation or abuse of those in authority when they are told the truth I What think you of such pious souls? Do you not think that they belong to the same family with those who in our Gospel witness the glorious miracle, but do not regard it as such, and ask for another sign which would please their fancy? Such people wish to rule in the land and community where they are, but also in the Church and over the Word of God. Such children will be pleasing to God – very!

But it is nowhere said that, because we should honor the authorities of the State, and raise no injurious reports concerning them, we ought to place such human authority above God and His Word. No, our rulers are also subject to this Word and to God, just as we are, and Him they must obey. If they act otherwise, we are in duty bound to reprove them without reserve, and to tell them what they do not like to hear, without considering whether they will frown at us or whether they will smile. The Gospel spares no one, be he of high or low estate; it rebukes what is wrong in every one.

To do this, God gave pastors and preachers; their duties are grave, and they must fulfill their office, so that they can give an account thereof on the day of judgment. If they do not rebuke you when you ought to be rebuked, God will demand your blood at their hands. Why then should we preachers put a still heavier load upon ourselves on your account, by preaching whatever pleases you? Remember that the Word is not our own, and that we are not here at your bidding to preach and to do according to your prescription. Faithful preachers dare not and will not shape their preaching to suit the notions of men. The church-doors are open; let him therefore who will not hear the truth go out, for it is not his business to regulate the office of the ministry.

These are the three kinds of persons present at the wonderful deed of Christ. The first are astonished and pleased, and praise it very much; the others are hostile to the Lord and abuse Him; the third, finally, desire Him to carry out their own whims. The Gospel will always have such different hearers.

The ministers of the Gospel will ever have to contend with such people; they must defend the honor of their Lord by preaching His Word fearlessly; nor will they be prompted either by the favor or by the ill-will of the hearers. If people do not wish to be converted it is not our fault; we have done our duty in presenting to them the truth and in rebuking them for their abuse of the Gospel. If they persist in not accepting our preaching, well and good; let them go to that place where they will comprehend the folly of their ways, and where they will see whom they have despised, abused and blasphemed.

The Lord answers those first, who had accused Him of casting out the devil through Beelzebub, and gives them a simple and easy reply: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? Because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub." This is a comparison which our understanding can easily comprehend. Where man and wife quarrel in their home, when he smashes the pots and the kettles, their house-keeping must come to a speedy end. Our experience teaches us that variance and contention lay waste entire countries, and break up whole families. What the Pharisees and Scribes said is therefore against all common sense, and they talk like fools and madmen.

The same is the case with our opponents, the Papists. Their practices and doctrine can be exposed as silly and groundless, and ours can be shown to be reasonable and proper, even without referring to the Scriptures. But it is of no use: all labor in that direction is lost.

We should not forget, in this connection, that Christ says that the devil has a kingdom, one that is well united and compact. If we offend one devil we offend the whole batch of them; if we attack one we attack all. If these devils did not work together in such close harmony, we would have gained more of the pope's followers. But since the realm of the devil is strong and united, it comes to pass that many people will not accept or believe the truth.

If we hear the Word, or are baptized, or receive the Sacrament of the Altar, we make an inroad upon the domain of Satan, and the reason that the devil with all his assistants does not prevail against us, is that the kingdom of Christ is also strong and united. As soon as the devil pounces upon you he attacks also Him who sitteth at the right hand of God, as He says to Paul: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" This is our consolation; but at the same time we should realize the fact that to be a Christian means more than child's play, since a mighty power is opposed to us, so that we would be in constant danger if God did not cover us with His grace.

Perhaps you will ask here: How does it happen that the conjurers, who are openly vicious and wicked men, can cast out devils? Remember this, that God does not work through them, but the devil himself. I myself saw a man full of devils, yet the priest who exorcised him was so certain in his work that he placed his hand in the mad man's mouth. Do we not see then that one devil casteth out another? I answer: St. Paul says that in the last times the devil will also perform signs, but they will be "lying wonders." He does not do them to promote the cause of the Gospel, but to lead people away from the faith into idolatry. I know that St. Cyriax, St. Anstet and other saints cast out devils, and that many thus possessed were brought to them, but the whole performance was the devil's own work; he left the sick, not because he was compelled, but of his own accord, that he might thus strengthen the superstition of the people. Likewise he often pretended that he was afraid of a consecrated candle, of a little salt, of holy water and the like. He did this for the sole purpose of strengthening people in their superstition, so that they might not come to the true faith, nor have

confidence in God and His Word. These signs were therefore *mendacia signa*, false and “lying wonders,” as St. Paul calls them; they were mere pretenses.

Let us look to the real and true signs; let us see how Christ and His apostles cast out the devil through the Word, so that he had to leave, whether he chose to do so or not. We will then discover how different the circumstances were. Here the devil had to come out, to testify thereby to the strength and glory of the Word of God and of the Christian faith. He does not do this voluntarily; hence neither the cross, nor holy water, nor other tricks will be of any avail.

Where it is to the advantage of the devil, for the purpose of spreading his lies and estranging an ungrateful world from Christ, by plunging them deeper and deeper into superstition, so that they will call upon the devil rather than upon Christ, he may indeed suffer himself to be cast out by some wicked conjurers. The whole transaction takes place to oppose the Gospel, to spread error and falsehood, to lead people to have faith in monkery, in the intercession of saints, in vigils, in masses and other so-called holy observances.

Where this can be gained the devil is very ready to be cast out. But where the finger of God is to be made manifest, and Christ’s kingdom to be established, the devil is very tenacious, and refuses to be cast out as long as he possibly can; as Jesus shows us in the parable of the strong man armed, who keepeth his palace.

Let us then thank God for the mercy shown unto us in sending His Son as a Savior from the power of Satan, and also for the Word which He has left us, whereby the devil is to be cast out continually, to the establishment and extension of the kingdom of God. May God continue unto us such mercy, through His Son and the Holy Ghost! Amen.

Laetare. John 6:1-15.

After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His miracles which He did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this He said to prove him: for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto Him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. 80 the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves; and when He had given thanks, He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled, He said unto His disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the live barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone.

This is one of the Gospels in which our Lord teaches His Christians to trust in Him, since He will not permit them to die of hunger, but will by His blessing give them a sufficiency of everything they need. Hence those

penurious souls who are ever intent upon their own interest, are not worthy to hear nor to heed this glorious lesson of our text. They hear how Christ, by His blessing, performed this great miracle, but they care not to have the same experience. They are, therefore, greedy and act as if Christ could not, or would not, perform a similar miracle for them; so they must provide for themselves, else they might be entirely overlooked and forgotten. Christ has nothing to do with such people.

The others, however, who faithfully confide in His Word, are here assured, not merely in words but in deed, that He will provide for them their daily food. Hence we ought not to doubt, nor be disturbed by the thought as to how we shall support ourselves, but we should place our whole trust and confidence in Christ. Such faith will not deceive us. Our Lord will be present with His blessing, so that the five loaves, if there are no more, will be sufficient to satisfy five thousand men, besides the women and children; yea, that the remainder will be more than the first supply. At first, before they eat, there was scarcely half a basket full of bread, afterwards there were twelve baskets full of fragments.

We learn this important lesson from this occurrence: That we should love God and diligently hear and believe His Word, as these people in our text did; that then God will provide us with our daily bread. It may be that not all of the people then fed were truly pious; but since there were those among them who feared God with all their heart, and cared more about hearing His Gospel than about eating, the Lord provided also for their bodily wants and gave them food before they expected it. By this deed He intended to tell them that man should first seek the kingdom of God, hear His Word and believe in Him; but also that each one should do with diligence what His calling bids him do, and that, as to the rest, He would provide. Though we are not rich and cannot count our dollars by the thousand, we shall have what we need. We cannot eat money, nor gold and silver, neither stones and the like; we must have bread, the produce of the ground. If we are so situated that we cannot thus gather the food from the fields; if we have neither house nor garner, neither farm nor garden, we will nevertheless obtain enough bread, if we have but faith and trust in God.

Such providential care is witnessed every day. Of a penniless scholar, who is diligent and pious, God often makes a great doctor; to a poor maidservant, who fears God and is faithful in the performance of her duties,

He gives a good husband and home. Similar examples, of daily occurrence, teach us how God assists the poor, while they who do not fear Him nor love His Word, or are otherwise dishonest and indolent, remain miserable beggars and thriftless all the days of their life.

Thus will God also permit an unruly boy, who hates to go to school and is wicked and dishonest, to go on in his vicious course, to become a hireling in some army, where he is stabbed to death or killed in some way, or to become a disreputable character. And the maid who is not pious nor virtuous, who is dishonest and lazy, will surely fall into sin and shame, so that she will be disgraced for her whole life. Such an end is well merited. If such persons would live uprightly and in the faith of Christ, He would be their protector and friend, and raise them to honor and wealth.

This Gospel plainly teaches us to trust in Christ, convinced that He will preserve us and give us what we need, if we but believe His Word and love to hear it, though this may cause us some inconvenience, as it did at first the people in our text. The deed which Christ here performs is as good as a sermon. He exhorts us thereby to be faithful and pious and to love His Word, and teaches us that then He will be with us to give us food and raiment and make something of us in the world, while, on the other hand, if we are faithless and disregard His Word, we will remain beggars, and that deservedly: even if we are rich our opulence cannot make us happy, we being still the devil's own. It remains a fixed fact that God will not grant the desires of those who are faithless and disregard His Word.

This lesson we learn from our Gospel, where Christ with five loaves of bread satisfies the hunger of five thousand men together with their women and children, who numbered perhaps five thousand more, so that they all had enough, with plenty of fragments remaining. Christ says, Matt. 6: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you;" here He preaches the same truth, but by His deed, not in words alone. He says by this miracle: I am rich and can easily satisfy your wants; be pious and look to me for help; I can and will provide for you. Thus much in regard to faith, as connected with the miracle of the Gospel today.

The Evangelist narrates two other items for our instruction and comfort. The first contains the question of Christ to the disciples, and their response;

the other, His command to gather up the fragments, that nothing might be lost.

Philip and Andrew are examples set before us to show that true faith is so often wanting, although the Lord, through His wonderful blessings, invites us to exercise our confidence in Him. We all make the same mistake which the disciples made; that is, we look but to our wants and calculate how much we need; that Christ with His blessing can give us everything, we are apt to forget.

Philip counts rapidly and correctly. He says: Two hundred penny worth of bread is needed, if every one in the crowd is to have but a little. If this sum is compared with the five thousand men, besides the women and children, of whom there were also many, as Matthew relates, it was insignificant indeed, and each one would have obtained but a slice of bread. Surely not much for a hungry stomach! We see that Philip made a close and correct estimate of the amount of bread needed for these hungry people in the desert. We indulge in similar calculations of what we need to support our families for a month, or for a whole year; and if we discover that the supply is not at hand, we are dejected and sad, as though we had to leave our house and home, or even die of hunger.

Andrew entertained similar thoughts. He observes that Christ desires to provide for the poor people who were suffering with hunger, and makes the announcement that there was a limited supply of food at hand, five loaves and two fishes.

But when he considered the great multitude, the many hungry mouths and stomachs, his hope failed him, so that he exclaims: "But what are they among so many?" His arithmetic proves itself stronger than his faith; he despairs of all relief for the multitude.

This is the great and common mistake, of which we men are always guilty. We understand very well how to reckon and calculate in regard to our wants; we know that we need counsel and assistance in the difficulties of this life. But if we do not see immediately the desired supply and help, we are sad and disturbed in mind. It would be far better if we would not calculate at all in these matters, leaving them in the hands of God. Then want and privation and cares, which we cannot avert with all our anxiety, would not trouble us before they really come.

Now we often busy and torment ourselves with plans and calculations which are all in vain, for we can never make ourselves rich by our own thoughts and cares. Put it may easily happen that these excessive cares and meditations in behalf of our worldly fortunes will bring upon us disease and insanity, as we learn from many examples.

Since our natural reason will but look to our wants, and can only calculate concerning them in direct opposition to faith, the evangelist would here, by the example of the disciples, show us that such anxious calculations are entirely unnecessary, if we are Christians and have Christ with us. Philip and Andrew reckon correctly according to their understanding of the circumstances, but we as Christians have not only our reason, but also the Word of God. Therefore it behooves us, at all times, to exercise our faith, and whenever our calculations prove unsatisfactory we should not be perplexed, but faithfully place our whole confidence in the Word.

The Christian should realize what a trustworthy Father and Provider his Lord is. Men, even when most liberal, can only give as long as they themselves have something; but here it is said of Christ: He distributed of the loaves and of the fishes as much they desire, not as much as was on hand. And what He did there He can and will still do for His Christians; this we must never forget. His blessings we experience every day; He gives to the pious poor and needy their daily bread, and assists them in every trouble in a wonderful and unexpected way. He is omnipotent, and has promised us His help and salvation.

The chief thing necessary then, whenever our human calculations fail, is earnest faith and prayer. We should be comforted by the knowledge that we have a God, who can not only multiply by His blessing the provisions which we have, as He did for the widow of Sarepta, but who can also make something from nothing. This consolation ought never to escape our memory, so that we do as Christ says, Matt. 6: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," and leave the rest to our Father in heaven, who careth for His people even while they sleep; that is, they shall receive blessings without knowing when or how they came, as it was here when the miracle was performed. For the bread and the fishes visibly increased and multiplied in the hands of Christ; when He broke one loaf into two parts, giving one away, then the other one was as large as before.

Christ desires us to have this deed clearly before our eyes, in order that we may learn from it to trust in Him, and to give up this reckoning with human figures merely, and this dependence upon the supply which we can see or touch.

We see in our days how much misery there is everywhere in the world. The infidels increase in strength and are ready to give us battle. We, on the other hand, are decreasing in power, on account of our dissensions, and lack of confidence in each other. The pope also is not at rest, but is as hostile to the Gospel as are the infidels. He and his followers do not yet desist from their base warfare to suppress the truth and to reinstate their former idolatries. When we observe this state of affairs it may happen that we are offended; our reason begins to calculate and to find ways and means by which these matters might be changed and amended. If these means are not readily at hand, if the reckonings result in a great deficit, the heart becomes sad, and almost despairs, because it seems as though everything were going awry. Since such tribulations are sure to come, because our flesh and blood is prone to bring them on, we should as Christians know that, though our reckoning furnishes no hope, we have yet the Word with its assurances, and in that we should ever trust.

What says the Word, and what shall we believe in such distress? This we must believe: Christ has conquered the world, and “the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church,” Matt. 16. “The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy,” Ps. 33. “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil,” 1 Pet. 3. “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished,” 2 Pet. 2. Peter still further exhibits this truth by the example of the pious Lot.

Whoever accepts the Word of God and His promises, relying upon them entirely, will not be distressed nor fearful if his reckonings fall far short of his expectations. He knows that he has a Lord who rules in the midst of His enemies, and who is ready to manifest the glory and power of His name, wherever the adversaries of His kingdom disturb His Christians, yea, that He will crush all His enemies, as He did Pharaoh and the Egyptian hosts. Thus through faith in the Word, and by means of it, hope is produced where everything would seem dark and gloomy, and where our reason would

despair. The Word of God points to a certain, happy issue from all troubles, if we but firmly cling to it and devoutly pray to God. The wicked, however, who continue in their lawless course, can find no consolation in these promises of God, with which the pious are comforted.

The disciples made a great mistake when they counted merely with figures and forgot to have faith and confidence in Christ their Lord. Philip should have said: Two hundred penny worth of bread is not enough, even if each one present would take but the smallest morsel, but fortunately Thou, our blessed Lord, art with us, and by Thy help we shall have plenty of bread, though we have no money and are in the desert. Thou hast unlimited power. Andrew should also have said: There is a lad here with five barley loaves and two fishes, which would not suffice for even ten of the hungry ones if I had to distribute these provisions; but if Thy hands will deal them out, they will be so multiplied that we shall all have enough, and plenty of fragments besides. Such assurance and faith they ought to have had from a knowledge of the Word. But through their minute calculations they displaced this knowledge, and we see how little confidence in the power of Christ they manifest on this occasion. From this it follows that, if we desire to act as Christians and to avoid this faithless reckoning and calculation as to our present and future wants, we must take the Word of God in hand and believe it, else there is no remedy for us.

When Christ has bestowed upon us His merciful gifts, we must also bear in mind that other lesson which he teaches the apostles on this occasion: "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." Just as our natural man, in times of suffering and want, can only reckon and not believe, so when by God's blessing seasons of plenty come, we are entirely unfit to use these gifts aright. Many abuse these abundant blessings of God, as we can see wherever we turn our eyes. If the year is fertile with food and wine, people begin to think they may now eat and drink and waste the provisions given, to their hearts content. But this would be wrong. We should diligently gather in the harvest which God has granted us, and use it properly, also laying aside what may remain for future necessity. Joseph instructed the king of Egypt in this economy, and ordered him so to use what the seven fat years yielded that he would have food for himself and the people during the seven years of famine.

Thus also the tradesman and the mechanic should do; if God gives them a successful and profitable year, they should husband well such blessings; they ought never to think that now they may use and spend much more than formerly. No, the gifts of God must at all times be considered as of the greatest value, and should be kept for future emergency. No doubt, God is often prompted by our great ingratitude and inconsiderate wastefulness and sinful abuse of His bounties, to send two or three years of sterility and failure to one year of fertility and success. How else could He put a restraint upon the criminal abuse of His gifts by the wicked and reckless world?

Others again abuse the bounties of God in a different way. They lay aside and store away when the years are fertile and the markets low, in order that they may gain large profits during the years of scarcity, by oppressing the poor and ruling the market prices as they choose. Such fellows are detestable oppressors, nor need they expect any mercy of God, unless they repent in time. Such dealings arouse the wrath of God. When the Lord orders the remaining fragments to be gathered up, He is not parsimonious, but teaches us how to value His blessings, and to be prepared in time of necessity to assist the poor; this we can do so much the easier if we are not wasteful. A far different thing would it be, if we bought up at the lowest prices wheat, corn, wine, and the like, storing away great quantities until the* times become pressing and provisions scarce, so that we might then sell at the highest rate, thereby oppressing others, especially the poor. This would be a criminal and filthy practice. God does not send a prosperous year that we alone should enjoy it at the expense of other people, or that we should pamper our greedy avarice.

God will surely punish such transactions. The man who trusts in God and His Word will always have enough, even in times of the greatest scarcity; God will bless for him the little that he has, so that it will become much, even to the leaving of fragments. On the other hand, he who abuses the gifts of God by being mean and niggardly will not enjoy the blessings of God, though he toils and scrapes from morning till night; his wealth will be of no benefit, and in the midst of plenty he will be unhappier than the most destitute beggar. It is a well known fact that misers and usurers are poor, miserable and unhappy people. They toil and sweat until they have collected their treasure, and then they toil and sweat still more to take care of it and to increase it. If an accident befalls them, as it often will; if the

grain molds in the field; if the wine runs into the cellar; or if any other misfortune happens, they weary themselves nearly to death with anxiety and lamentation, so that they cannot enjoy what they possess. Misfortune, care, toil and disease is their reward.

Who would not a thousand times rather have but a little, and enjoy it in peace and with a happy heart, especially if we remember how the devil is closely watching these stingy souls, to make them insane and crazy when they suffer losses in their money and goods, until finally in their misery they go and hang themselves, or commit suicide in some other way, while God richly provides for the poor. Then follows a misery much more terrible than that which they would escape on earth – eternal damnation. This is the result if man abuses the gifts of God and with them feeds his avarice. Nor ought they to be carelessly wasted, but they should be properly used and taken care of, so that in time of want we may be able to assist others who have less than we. God does not give to this or to that person more than to another that he should abuse this abundance in luxury and pleasures, but that he should use it right gladly to the support and assistance of the poor and the needy.

To trust in Christ our Lord and, under all circumstances, to believe in His Word and to wait for blessings from Him, is the pleasing and comfortable lesson taught us in our Gospel. God grant that we may grow in faith from day to day, so that we may in our own life experience His blessings, through Christ Jesus our Lord! Amen.

Judica. John 8:46-69

Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. Then answered the Jews, and said unto Him, Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honor my Father, and ye do dishonor me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. Then said the Jews unto Him, Now we know that Thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and Thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste death. Art Thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest Thou Thyself? Jesus answered, if I honor myself, my honor is nothing: it is my Father that honoreth me; of whom ye say, that He is your God: and ye have not known Him; but I know Him: and if I should say, I know Him not, I shall be a liar like unto you; but I know Him, and keep His saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto Him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast Thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then took they up stones to cast at Him: but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

This is a precious and comprehensive Gospel, concerning which much might be said. It is however too full of import and truth to be wholly considered at one time; we shall therefore confine our attention to the most prominent declaration contained therein, which is that of Christ: "He that is of God heareth God's words, ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."

These are very plain words, so that no one, at first glance, would judge them to contain so deep a meaning. But when we look at these words closely, and carefully meditate upon them, when we ask what it means to be or not to be of God, we will discover how important a subject is here mentioned by Christ. For we cannot pronounce a severer judgment upon any one, or reproach him more decisively, than by saying that he is not of God. To be called a knave or a villain, or to be murdered in cold blood, is nothing compared with the horrible misery which the Lord describes in few words, when he says to the Jews: "Ye are not of God." It is therefore the chief thing necessary gladly to hear and diligently to retain the Word of God.

In the narrative of our Gospel we can clearly see that all those who do not wish to hear the Word of God, but speak evil of it, follow the devil whithersoever he leads them, until they are finally wholly his own; they sink lower and lower in their degradation from day to day. The Jews at first, when Christ begins to preach, are angry; afterwards they rail upon Him, calling Him a Samaritan and one "who has a devil." Here we see how rapidly they fell, sinking ten fathoms deeper into hell than before. Soon after they become still more foolish and ask: "Whom makest Thou Thyself?" In short, they become worse and worse in their denunciations, until they come to an open assault, and like murderers pick up stones to throw at Christ for the purpose of killing Him. They committed this awful crime because they had despised the Word of God, and would not hear the preaching of Christ, but blasphemed Him. All this was an evident indication, according to the statement of the Lord, that the Jews were of the devil; for if they had been of God, they would have conducted themselves differently towards His Word, which Christ preached.

The reason why children in our day are so frequently disobedient and disrespectful towards their parents, will be found in their disregard of the Word of God. They are unwilling to hear it; or if they do hear it they neither learn nor retain it. If they have once begun, in opposition to the will of God, to despise their parents, they will not stop here in their career of sin, but will soon begin to curse their father and their mother, and though they do not strike or slay them with the hand, they still wish them dead; or they will lead such an abominable life of infamy and crime, that their parents will grieve themselves to death.

Thus it is everywhere. He who will not hear the Word of God, nor follow its precepts, becomes a liar, a slanderer and a persecutor. The Papists are a living example of this fact; day after day they grow madder and more raging, nor will they desist from their blasphemy and persecution, until they become murderers and instigators of great bloodshed.

Such conduct is the most criminal. If a man is given to other sins it is possible to convince him of his wrong, so that he desist from his wickedness. But it is utterly in vain to attempt to convince the Papists, and also many among us, that they do a great wrong if they are unwilling to hear the Word of God, and even despise and defame it. They are so corrupt as to imagine that they do this rightfully and meritoriously. The cause of this is that they deny this word to be God's Word; they regard it as the devil's doctrine and sheer falsehood; and the preachers of it are in their eyes the most despicable heretics and seducers from the truth. The Jews did the same when they called Christ a Samaritan. With this assertion they made manifest their thoughts, in regard to teaching, thus claiming for the most abominable sin an appearance of great sanctity.

The very devil himself is loose among the people, when they fall into the sin of disregarding the Word of God, so that they will neither hear nor heed it. The result is that they will openly persecute Christ, as did the Jews, who hurled stones at Him, and finally nailed Him to the cross, claiming impunity for such a horrible crime. Be careful then that you do not follow their example.

It is therefore a sharp and severe word which Christ says to the Jews; "Ye hear not the Word of God, because ye are not of God." For he who is not of God is of the devil, and has corruption and pestilence, and every other hellish plague upon his back; we could not invoke greater evils upon him. Alas, that this great and horrible sin is so prevalent among all classes of men! How many will you find, among rich and poor, who will lay it to heart as an awful announcement when you tell them: My friends, it is not well that you do not hear the preaching of God's Word, or if you hear it that you do not heed it; it must be that you are not of God! The greater part of these people would answer: What do I care for the Church; I know well enough what I have to do! And if you should still further tell them: Stop and consider; if you desire to be saved you must amend in this respect,— then will you discover that these people will only become more enraged by your

admonition, turning you off with harsh and vulgar words, demanding of you to let them alone, or they will teach you your business with their fists.

Such stubbornness and wrath is terrible, so that a Christian heart trembles at the thought of it, especially when it is borne in mind what Christ says: "He that heareth not the words of God is not of God, but is the devil's child." The most deplorable circumstance in this connection is the infatuation, in which these defamers of God's Word live, so that they do not perceive the error of their ways, but defend their conduct with bitter resolution. Thus did the Jews; they answered Christ: "Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? A self-righteous devil, who thinks that he is always right, is the worst of all devils; and such an one was prompting the Jews.

This is the first lesson taught in our Gospel, that they who will not hear the Word of God are not of Him, but of the devil. This, of course, does not mean that the devil created such persons with their body, mind and all they possess. No, God bestowed upon them these gifts, wherefore we must distinguish between the abilities of man and their use. The man who lies and cheats has a good tongue given to him by God, but the use which he makes of it is of the devil in whose service he abuses it against God. Thus also God may give to man beautiful and charming eyes, but their employment for lustfulness is of the devil. If the heart yearns after lewdness, falsehood and deceit, it is wicked and of the devil, in respect to its use, though it be good and of God as to its essence.

On the other hand, "to be of God" means to employ willingly and gladly the ears in hearing the Word of God, and to accept rebuke for that which is wrong. Thus we should also use the tongue to pray, to preach, to instruct and to give consolation. Ears and tongues thus engaged are of God and good; they accomplish the purpose for which they were given. The heart also, if it meditates upon that which is comely, upon what is beneficial for our fellow men, and does not give offense, is a creature of God as well as the ears and the tongue. It is of God, because it strives to follow the precepts of God, and loves to hear His Word, and shuns everything opposed to it. It may happen, alas! that we are overtaken unaware by our weakness; that we curse where we ought to pray, and give way to anger where we ought to manifest kindness; but if we see our wrong and confess it, asking for mercy, we may then indeed have wavered, or even fallen, but we are not

yet of the devil. If a man repents of his sins, and turns to God with the firm resolution to avoid that which is wrong, he will obtain mercy, and the devil is not his master.

The children of the devil are they who are obstinate in their wickedness, who care naught for instruction and admonition, but steadily pursue their sinful course. Such persons are “of the devil,” and will become worse and worse, since he continually urges them onward in their crime. At first they disregard the Word, then they blaspheme and scorn and curse it. Finally they are filled with murderous desires, as the Jews were when they took up stones. The devil can easily be detected by his promptings to disrespect the Word of God, to defame and curse it, to do evil unto others, and to seek the death of the preachers of the Gospel. Such manifestations point out the devil and his offspring beyond all doubt; he is a liar and a murderer, an enemy of God and His Word.

Let us therefore be vigilant, that we may avoid the sin of disregarding the Word of God, but let us hear it right gladly. If we thus hear and retain it, conforming our lives to its precepts, we can be assured that we are of God and are His children. The others can also know beforehand their doom; they are children of the devil. Since they reject the Word, they lose all hope of righteousness and life, but wallow, if I may be permitted the expression, in the filthy excrements of the devil. Nor does their wealth, or high position in the world, suffice to cover their sin. The pope with the entire crowd of his followers is guilty of this sin, for he will not permit the Word of God to rule, and persecutes and slays the Christians. This is the devil’s true calling.

To hear God’s Word with a willing heart indicates, on the other hand, that such people are of God. God is no murderer, but a Creator of life; the devil however has never created nor infused life into any one. As God is the God of life, so shall they, who are of Him and hear His Word, also have life, according to the declaration of Christ: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.”

What is meant by “keeping the Word of God?” To believe what Christ in His Gospel tells us concerning the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and firmly to retain such faith and hope. He who does this has eternal life, nor will sin, hell and judgment terrify him, since grace and mercy prevail. Death will indeed overcome him, but not with those terrible feelings, which

they experience who die without faith and in the presence of the devil. These die unwillingly, with violent convulsions and with bellowings similar to those of cattle; they obstinately resist death, but still must die. If they could, they would put walls of adamant between themselves and death.

Christ declares that it shall not be thus with His disciples who hear and keep His Word. They will be exempt from such terror and suffering upon their death-bed. They trust in their God and are content, falling asleep in death, in the sure hope of a better life. Peaceably, and without trembling, they bid farewell to this world. For death, though he executes his power also upon the bodies of the believers, will for them lose his sting, so that they will meet him as a harbinger inviting to rest.

Thus it often occurs that the poor convicts, who are publicly put to death, die with resignation, and without such mad ravings as people indulge in who are without the consolation of the Word of God.

Consider therefore, my dear children, what great advantage you have, if you willingly hear and learn the Word of God. Learn, first of all, that you are of God, having conquered the devil and hell, so that neither sin nor the judgment of God can terrify. You will also be enabled to endure calmly other annoyances which, though they be ever so trifling, make the world impatient and hopeless.

It is true, the Christians must suffer much from the devil and the world, their bitter enemies. Their body and life, their possession and honor are often in great danger. How shall they endure all this with patience? In no other way than by clinging to the promises of God, so that they can exclaim: Let the world wag and do as it pleases, I am not of her, but of God, else would the world be my friend; but I prefer that she should hate and harass me on every side, to having her good will and then to be not of God. If the heart is thus minded, all tribulation and adversity will pass by as do the clouds in the sky or the birds in the air; we see them for a time and then no more.

Our only comfort in this life must be the possession of the Word and its power, especially when the last hour comes, when death approaches. If we believe the Word with a childlike faith, death will be as a sleep to us. Yea, it will be as when one who journeys along in a dense mist is attacked and slain before he is aware of the presence of the murderer. The devil is indeed

a murderer, who has determined upon our death; we know that well. But this his threat and sure attack shall not alarm us. We have the Word, to it we cling; that causes resignation, joy and courage in the presence of dire visitations, even of death. The confidence that through Christ we have in heaven a Father, kind and merciful, will give us strength and patience to endure with true fortitude all the trials of life to the end. This consolation we find in the Word, and nowhere else.

Tell me then, should this not be the chief endeavor of man, to obtain amid the various trials and sorrows of life this consolation, thus to be happy and contented? Yet all these adverse experiences in our daily life are insignificant, compared with the last and greatest evil, death. No physician, skillful though he be, nor advice or assistance of any mortal being can aid and rescue us from the terror of this our foe; Christ alone, our Lord and Savior, must be our help. He gives us a remedy, so sure and so effective, that everything else which we possess is valueless compared with it.

How is this truth observed among us? When God offers this remedy, even at our own hearthstones, we reject it. Hence it happens that we are not of God and fall from one sin into the other, and become more wicked day after day, as has been shown above. If then the dying hour comes, we have no hope, nor consolation, so that we wind and twist ourselves in agony upon our bed, lamenting and crying, yea, even bellowing as an ox before the slaughter.

The chief lesson of our Gospel today is the exhortation to learn the Word of God with a ready heart, and to keep it in faith. If we do this, we shall be conquerors over sin, death and hell. Let death devour us as he may, we shall not feel the piercing of his fangs. The Word of Christ is our armor, through which we shall obtain a peaceable death and life eternal.

The wicked and the lawless, who despise the Word, have already the severest punishment possible; since they heed not the Word of God they are not of Him. What more terrific judgment could be pronounced upon a wicked child, which despises the command of God and disobeys its parents, than to call it the child of the devil? Truly, this is no light matter. I for my part would rather be in the hands of the executioner or the cannibals, than to be a victim of the devil, who is a liar and murderer, and thrusts into everlasting damnation.

Be careful to avoid such calamity. Learn, I beg you, learn with all diligence, to appreciate the treasure which is yours in the word of your Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that outside of the Word there are no means of escape from the devil, sin and eternal death; hence it must be accepted in confidence and firm faith.

When Christ says: "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death," He has no reference to the Law given by Moses to the Jews, which is indeed proper, good and holy, but cannot be fully observed by us, because we are sinners by nature and children of wrath. Hence the Law is a savor unto death; it points out our transgressions and their well-merited punishment. We need then another Word which takes away our sins and justifies us before God. Such a Word we have in the Gospel of Christ, where He gives us the comfortable assurance: "If a man believeth in me, he shall never see death."

This saying requires faith; we must not doubt in the least that what Christ here declares is true. If we would leave the Word out of view, and would judge according to our own knowledge and perception, we would see nothing but death. We must therefore in our great affliction of sin never judge by what we see or feel, but by the Word, so that we can say: I perceive that I must die, but I also have the assurance of Christ and His Word that I shall live again through Him. He has paid my ransom from death, which was caused by my sins; God is merciful unto me and will give eternal life on account of His death and resurrection. He who has such faith keeps the Word; but it is not easily done, since flesh and blood are averse to faith and would always rather judge according to what they see and feel. We should never entertain such faithlessness, but pray to God for His Holy Spirit to strengthen our hearts in the Word, and to keep us in the true faith evermore.

The Lord tells us also, in conclusion, the reason why His Word is so effective and powerful; at which assertion the Jews became so enraged that they took up stones to kill Him. They could not understand the declaration of Christ that His Word would save from eternal death, since they knew that Moses, Abraham and other holy men of whom the Scriptures make mention, had died; men whom they regarded as superiors of Christ. Hence they concluded that it was a vain boast to speak of His Word as He did. But Christ answered: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw

it and was glad.” That is, if Abraham had not believed in my Word he would have died an eternal death, for “I am before Abraham was.” I am the eternal and omnipotent God, whoever wishes to escape death and live forever must be saved by me. This neither Moses nor any other prophet could say of themselves, for they were all human; Christ however is God and man, therefore He and none other is able to give life and salvation.

This declaration is very consoling, and a sure testimony of our faith that Christ is the Son of God, true man and true God from eternity. Similar proofs of this truth we find in other parts of the Gospel. We should therefore place our whole confidence in Him alone, and trust firmly in His Word, for it is the Word of God and cannot lie. Whatever He says is true, and must be true in all eternity. Through this Word God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. I repeat, therefore, learn with diligence this important truth, and praise God for such instruction, and pray that He may, through His Holy Spirit, retain us in the Word and save us for evermore through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Volume 2

First Sermon For The Day Of The Lord's Supper. The Holy Sacrament. 1 Cor. 11. 23-26. (Translated By Prof. E. Schmid)

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread: and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come.

According to a time-honored usage, more people come to the Lord's Table at this season than at any other time during the year. This fact, together with the urgent necessity that on a stated day the doctrine of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper be plainly taught the people from the pulpit, prompts us to consider now the words of St. Paul, which you have heard read in our text. From these words we learn that this Sacrament was in no wise instituted or introduced by men, but by Christ Himself. In the night in which He was betrayed He instituted it for His disciples, yea for all Christians, that it might be unto them His Testament, His parting gift, full of great comfort and blessing. We Christians should therefore cherish this Testament as a treasure of the highest value, should love it dearly, and should make use of it cheerfully and frequently, deriving from it much joy and consolation, thus fulfilling the will of our dying Lord and Saviour. His command in this regard is plain; He enjoins upon us the use of this Sacrament. True

Christians will never disregard this command, but will readily and often find comfort in its fulfillment, even until that day when the Lord, who Himself gave us such a Testament, shall again come from heaven to judge the quick and the dead.

While the Pope yet held us in his sway we were frightened by the words of St. Paul: “He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself;” for no one taught us aright what these words really mean. Hence the Holy Sacrament was dishonored; the people shunned it as death-bringing, and instead of regarding it as food unto life, they thought it dangerous and pernicious. The lying priests brought this about, though we richly deserved it by our own base ingratitude. Christ meant it so well with us, but we were careless and ungrateful; no wonder therefore that our joy was changed into sorrow, our happiness into weeping, and our blessing into a curse. We ourselves were to blame in this; we shamefully neglected the great and sacred treasure.

A similar calamity is now threatened by the Sacramentarians, who bring dangerous controversies into the churches by their false doctrines concerning the Sacrament; for they teach the people that in it we have naught but bread and wine, thus depriving the Christians again of the comfortable assurance of grace, which Christ has connected with this Sacrament and given to His Church. We must therefore avoid these false teachers, else they will drag us once more into the bitter woe which we endured under the Pope, when it had become customary to preach of this Sacrament in such a manner as to produce but fear and trembling, so that people refused to participate in it, and lost all the gladness and grace which this holy food can bring.

We were told that we must first confess all our sins, and do penance for them, ere we could approach the Table of the Lord. To do this was, however, an impossibility. We were conscious of our sinfulness and feared to partake of this food, judging ourselves unworthy of it, so that no one could commune with a cheerful heart. Every one mistrusted this benign institution, fearing it to be a source of death, or a means of “eating damnation to himself,” as St. Paul expresses it. Surely that was a most lamentable state of affairs, when the people became averse to the most blessed Sacrament.

But the Pope made the evil worse by inconsiderately compelling the terrified and trembling souls to come to the Lord's Supper at least once a year. He excommunicated every one who did not annually come to the Sacrament; and yet he only distributed it under one form, as it is called, in direct contradiction to the command of our Lord, who so instituted His Testament that His body and blood should be received not only by eating of the bread, but also by partaking of the cup. This form of the institution of the Sacrament the Pope trampled under foot, and he even yet condemns as a heresy the distribution of the Lord's Supper under a twofold form, even though Christ Himself thus instituted and ordered it. What a terrible abomination they made of the Sacrament, causing people to be afraid of it, and then forcing them to receive it; and what was worse than all, changing the form of the institution, in plain opposition to the command of Christ.

Imagine for yourself what pleasure you would have in such a compulsory eating and drinking. You would have as little relish for it as the sick man has for the wine whose very smell he abhors, but which he is forced to swallow. It was a necessary consequence that the Holy Sacrament proved ineffectual with the people in the papacy; for they could but receive it with the conviction of their own impurity and unworthiness, and yet through fear of excommunication they partook of it. No wonder that it was to them void of consolation and happiness.

But the Pope still further abused the Holy Supper and the Testament of our Lord, when by the assistance of his priests he made it a matter of merchandise in behalf of the dead, so that the mass was celebrated without devotion, merely for money and revenue. Methinks this was, beyond all dispute, a most sacrilegious abuse of the Sacrament; and I have not the least doubt, if popery had remained in its glory, if the blessed Gospel had not been brought to light again, the living would finally have been entirely deprived of the Holy Supper, and it would have been applied only to the dead. Those of us more advanced in years can well recollect the pomp and ostentation with which mass for the departed was everywhere celebrated.

I mention these things in this connection to show how God punished an ungrateful world by permitting the Pope to distribute the Sacrament in a mutilated manner to a benighted people, who went to the Lord's Table as if to perform a work, not to receive a blessing, fearing the wrath and judgment of God.

In addition to this the Pope employed the mass as a soothing remedy for every kind of misfortune and disease. Let such perversions be to us a warning example, that we may not become similar despisers of the Holy Sacrament, but that we may receive it right gladly, according to its institution and true meaning.

Tell me, is it not an exceedingly cheering word, when the Lord tells His disciples so graciously and kindly: "Take and eat, this is my body; take and drink ye all of it; this cup is the"New Testament in my blood, this do in remembrance of me," and do it not only once, but repeatedly until the end of time? Our blessed Lord desired, by means of this Sacrament and Testament, to keep alive in us our remembrance of Him and our faith. He therefore instituted His Supper as a constant memorial of His death, through which we are delivered from our sins and eternal misery.

In this we can see naught but condescension and love; there is no anger here nor vengeance; yea, parents could not deal more kindly with their children. Christ's chief desire, as He Himself declares, is that we shall not forget Him. It is His earnest intention that our whole being shall be impressed with the memory of His passion, that we may never forget how He died for us upon the cross and rose again from the dead. It was His purpose that coming generations should know Him as their Lord, that they might be saved by Him; and therefore, also, He earnestly enjoined upon Christians to instruct the young in His word, and to keep His remembrance sacred, that those who come after them may also be induced to worship Him in the congregation of believers, and own Him as their Christ and only consolation. For this reason the Lord made His Testament, and we ought never to weary in the remembrance of it. Surely, when true friends meet it is no burdensome task for them to sit together in conversation throughout the night, forgetful of sleep and rest; why then should we grow weary of learning and of preaching the precious truth that Christ the Lord is our Redeemer?

But the Sacrament of the Holy Supper was instituted not merely that by its observance Christ might be honored; for He can truthfully say: I need not thy praise, I am the Son of God, whether thou glorifiest me or not; but also and especially for the reason that we stand in need of such a Testament and Supper, and that we might be benefited by it. Listen to the words with which He gives the bread: "Take, eat, this is my body, which is given for

you,” and with which, soon after, He gives the cup: “Drink ye all of it; this cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you, for the remission of sins.”

This declaration is the Christian’s most effective consolation; for he who really believes that Christ gave His body for him, and that He shed His blood for the remission of his sins, cannot despair, no matter what sin, the world and the devil may say. He knows that this treasure wherewith his sins have been canceled is far greater than all his iniquities.

But the consolation contained in this declaration stands not alone; Christ really gives us with the bread His body to eat, and with the wine His blood to drink, as the words plainly state, in spite of the devil. Each one that eateth and drinketh, receives for himself in this Sacrament the body and the blood of Christ as his own especial gift. Yea, this is the very truth which we must firmly hold: Christ suffered and died for me also, and not alone for St. Peter, St. Paul or other saints. To assure us of this truth Christ gave His Testament; for through it each one individually receives the body and the blood of Christ. It is therefore proper to say that through this Sacrament we obtain forgiveness of sins; for where Christ is, there is forgiveness of sins; here we have His body and blood, as the words declare; therefore he who eats and drinks, believing that the body of Christ was given for him, and that His blood was shed for the forgiveness of his sins, must surely have this forgiveness. Yet, it is not the act of going to the Sacrament, nor the eating and the drinking, whereby we gain this divine grace, as the Papists falsely teach concerning the performance of their mass; but it is the faith in us which believes the words of Christ when He says: I give you my body, given for you into death, and give you my blood, shed for you for the remission of your sins. Thus will our reception of the Sacrament tend to the strengthening of our faith, and the chief and greatest blessing of this Testament will be ours.

Another benign effect of this Sacrament is the union, in faith and doctrine, which it produces among Christians, and which is so very necessary. To bring about true union among Christians it is not sufficient, that they come together to hear the same preaching and the same word, but they must also meet around the same altar to receive the same food and drink.

One may, perchance, hear me preach the word and yet be my enemy; but if one partakes of the Lord's Supper he, by that act, makes for himself, individually, a public confession of his faith, although there may be hypocrites now and then; and thus a more reliable union, between the Christians who unite in this Sacrament, is formed than if they merely had the Gospel preached unto them, though this may also cause them to be of one mind. Those of the same faith and the same hope unite at the Table of the Lord, while those of a different faith stand aloof. Agreement in the Church is very desirable, and there should be no divisions in matters of faith. This union was properly called, by a Latin term, *Communio*, a communion, and those who would not agree with other Christians in faith, doctrine and life were called *Excommunicati*, as being different in their belief and conduct, and hence unworthy to belong to the congregation of those who are of one mind, lest they might produce dissensions and schisms. By means also of the Holy Sacrament Christ establishes this union among the little company of His believers.

Our old teachers entertained beautiful thoughts in regard to this when they said: Christ took bread and wine for His Supper to indicate that, just as many distinct and separate grains of wheat, when ground together, make one loaf of bread, so we, being many, are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread, though each one is a distinct person and separate individuality, 1 Cor. 10. And again, as many clusters of grapes and many little berries, each distinct and separate, when pressed together form one delicious juice, one wine, thus it is with the Christians who have the same faith, the same confession, the same love and hope of salvation.

This was the interpretation of our fathers, and they were not mistaken in it. The Holy Sacrament has the effect to firmly join the Christians together in unity of purpose, doctrine and faith, so that no one should stand alone, nor have his own doctrine or belief. The devil is sorely vexed at this, and is busy in endeavoring to destroy such unity and agreement. He knows full well what injury results to him, if we are united in our confession and adhere to one Head; hence he endeavors to tempt us, here and there, with false doctrines, with doubt, with lying insinuations in regard to the Sacrament and other articles of faith, hoping to cause dissensions in the Church.

It is true, offenses will come, yet it behooves us to guard against them, so that the devil may not entirely separate us. If one or the other insists on differing with us in the doctrine of the Sacrament, or in other parts of our faith, let us, who agree in one confession, be so much the more united in our faith in Christ Jesus; yea, let us be in this as one man. This, however, is only possible where there is unity in doctrine.

This, then, is an additional benefit of the institution of the Holy Supper. Our Lord gave us this Sacrament to bring about unity of faith, of doctrine and of life. The external differences in the stations of life will, of course, continue; there is no equality there. Each one has his own duties to perform, which differ vastly from each other. A farmer leads another life than a prince; the wife and mistress of the house has other duties to perform than the maid-servant. Such distinctions must ever remain in our every day life. But in Christ there is neither male nor female, no prince nor tiller of the soil: they are all Christians. The Gospel, the promise and faith which I have, belongs equally to prince, peasant, woman, servant and child.

Such equality is indicated by the Holy Supper, since in it we all receive the same food and nourishment, whether we be man or wife, matron or maid, father or child, ruler or subject. If we have the same faith we are heirs of the same heaven, though I may reside here and another in Jerusalem, and we are personally total strangers to each other; for we both have the same Lord, in whom we believe and hope for salvation. This union of faith causes the devil immense displeasure, and he is ever on the alert to sunder our communion; for he knows how his influence is thwarted when Christians firmly agree in faith and doctrine. Against these attempts of Satan, Christ instituted this Holy Sacrament as a means of uniting the believers.

From this it follows that this Sacrament is needed by every individual; and if we disregard it and fail to praise the Lord, and so sever ourselves from the communion of Christians, the loss will be ours, and will become greater the longer we abstain from the Sacrament. It is true, indeed, that Christ has no need for Himself of our compliance with His ordinance, nor of our remembrance of Him; it is to our own advantage to do so; for if we are not in communion with Christ we are in communion with the devil, and will suffer great injury. Even if Satan cannot harm us externally, we still will carry with us in our bosoms our bitter foe.

We ever have near us an advocate of evil, whether we eat or drink, whether we are asleep or awake, even our own flesh, the old Adam. He accompanies us to bed and arises with us in the morning; he pleads unceasingly and eloquently, with the fixed purpose of estranging us from Christ and His Gospel. This advocate of evil whom we constantly carry about with us, and whose habitation is in our hearts, is ever intent on exciting us to become rich and great in the world, and sways us with the delusion that we have neither occasion nor time to go to the Sacrament. If we heed his lying counsels we will grow colder and colder in our love towards Christ and His gifts; yea, though we might even daily hear His word, this cunning tempter within us will bring it to pass that we do so merely outwardly, while in reality our devotion is a sham, and our thoughts are engaged with the business of this world. Show me the avaricious man who grows weary of his passion! Is it not rather time that the covetous man becomes fonder and fonder of his idols from day to day, cherishing and pursuing with eagerness avarice and usury? The same is true in regard to other sins. The lewd person delights in his unchastity; he thinks and speaks about it with evident glee, and indulges in his wicked passion more and more. Such are the results of the instructions which the old Adam gives: they lead to destruction.

Christ desires to counteract the sinister influence of the old seducer within us, who would fix our attention alone and chiefly on temporal things. Christ instead would have us be mindful of eternity, of Himself, our Saviour, who died for us upon the cross. He would fain have us see our foolishness, so that we would gladly come unto Him, weary of our depraved life exclaiming: O Lord, we know how sinful we are, and how unable to resist the allurements of evil, therefore we cry unto Thee for help; enable Thou us to shun the world and to love Thee truly. We stand in daily need of such remembrance of Christ in opposition to this pernicious advocate, this old Adam within us, who clamors about our ears day and night, hoping to plunge us, beyond all help, into the cares and pleasures of this world.

To counteract this wicked purpose, Christ instituted His Holy Supper, that its celebration should remind us of the life to come. He takes the bread and the cup, and tells His disciples to eat and to drink, saying, "This is my body and blood, given for you, and shed for your sins," at the same time

exhorting us to remember Him, and not to run merely after the things of this world, as we generally do. In the Holy Supper He gives us an opportunity to receive Him, to come unto Him, and to remember Him; for in Communion the benefit is ours; He has no need of it.

I doubt not that the people would fairly crowd to the Sacrament if money, or earthly gifts, were distributed there; yea, the blind and the lame would rush thither, regardless of intervening rivers and mountains.

We ought, indeed, to be ashamed of ourselves, when we think what a miserable set we are, always ready to run after money and perishable things, while we are so slow, yea, so averse, to come to the Table of the Lord, where a heavenly gift, even His body and blood, awaits us. Here, in this Testament, a precious treasure, salvation and happiness, is to be conveyed to us; but, alas, we flee from it as from poison or some terrible punishment.

How comes it that we prize gold and silver more than this magnificent, precious treasure? The devil is the instigator of this our choice; he influences our old Adam, who is naturally backward and indifferent towards things eternal, and cares more for that which is temporal. This ingratitude and carelessness is very sinful, yea, much more than can be imagined; nevertheless we are often guilty of it, else we would seek more diligently the kingdom of heaven and its blessings, which are not transitory, like the earthly property, of which we are so much enamored. Let us never forget that we must in due time render an account of our behavior in this regard.

The Lord's Supper admonishes us not to be ungrateful any longer, but to realize, together with other Christians, with whom we confess our faith and share this most Holy Sacrament, what great blessings Christ bestows upon us through it, and how we should therefore serve and praise Him as our Lord, who not only died for us, but also gives us, as nourishment for our souls, His body and blood. He desires that we should remember Him whilst we receive it to the strengthening of our faith and the preservation of unity among the Christians.

Whosoever refuses to comply with the command of the Lord, deserves to fall into the hands of false teachers, who preach to him that in the Lord's Supper there is naught but bread and wine. In the papacy the doctrine

concerning this Sacrament was falsified, for the Lord was not remembered as He had ordered it; and hence it resulted that no one knew what the Lord's Supper was, and why one should receive it. Obedience to the Church was considered the chief concern of all, and the result was idolatry and invocation of the saints.

God grant that we may retain the true faith and have a living interest in this matter. We have the doctrine true and pure again, we understand why we go to the Holy Sacrament, to remember the Lord with praise and thanksgiving for His mercy and kindness, and also to receive therefrom consolation and strengthening of our faith. Let then our hearts be firm and not doubt; let us be assured that God is pleased with us, and will not punish us for our sins, since Christ gave for us His body and for us shed His sacred blood. Thus will we proclaim the death of our Lord aright and fulfill His command: "Do this in remembrance of me."

In view of this, judge for yourself what kind of Christians those persons are, who stay away from the Lord's Supper one whole year, yea two, three and even more years? Such people are surely possessed of the devil; they either have no knowledge of their sins, and consequently take no thoughts how to be relieved of them, are else they are so wrapped up in the affairs of this world that they entirely forget the life to come. This is dreadful indeed. Whosoever professes to be a Christian and desires to live in accordance with his profession, must come repeatedly and often to the Holy Sacrament. Its blessings are very necessary for the Christian, as we have shown above.

This, however, does not apply to those who cannot receive the entire Sacrament as it was instituted by Christ, and hence refrain from participating in it at all. Such people must be satisfied with the word of Christ and the assurances of His Gospel, until God in mercy gives them an opportunity to enjoy again the Holy Supper in its entirety and purity, as Christ instituted it.

May God give us grace, through His Holy Spirit, that we may ever receive this blessed Sacrament to the glory of Christ, and to our souls' salvation. Amen.

Second Sermon For The Day Of The Lord's Supper. 1 Cor. 11:27- 34. (Translated By Prof. E. Schmid)

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.

This text is of great importance and deserves to be attentively considered by Christians. We have already learned, from the previous sermon, how the people misunderstood these words, so as to deprive themselves of the comfort contained in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, yea, even shunned it as something dangerous.

It is true, Judas did not receive this Sacrament to his consolation or amendment. There were also many among the Corinthians, as St. Paul tells us, who received it unworthily, and thus brought upon themselves bodily and spiritual punishment. There is indeed a difference in the reception of this Sacrament; some partake of it worthily and unto eternal life, but others

unworthily unto condemnation, inasmuch as they do not repent and have true faith. Hence it is of the first importance that we learn to know what is meant by the expression “eating and drinking worthily or unworthily.”

The Papists taught that one should not partake of this Sacrament except he be entirely fit and perfectly pure. Such fitness, however, they made dependent upon certain works of penance, much eulogized by the priests; such as auricular confession, castigation of the body, fastings, prayers, giving of alms, and the like. These were accounted sufficient satisfaction for the sins committed. But such worthiness is of no account; for it is impossible by our own deeds to become really pure and worthy before God. Even the disciples were not perfectly pure when Christ gave them His Supper, for He tells them that they have need of washing their feet, by which He meant not the washing with water, but the forgiveness of their sins.

Let us then learn to understand and to remember, in this connection, that they do not receive the Sacrament unworthily who know and mourn their wretchedness; who confess that they are poor, miserable sinners; who experience many a temptation; who are yet affected by anger and impatience, by passion and intemperance. Such and similar sins adhere to us more or less as long as we live on earth: and if we earnestly repent of them, and do not continue in them against the warning voice of our conscience; if we seek their forgiveness and consolation in the misery which they brought upon us, we ought not to be deterred from coming to the Holy Sacrament. As long as the old Adam is within us, it will surely happen that impatience, wicked thoughts, and the like, will trouble us and cause us to sin. If we then had to remain away from the table of the Lord until we had become entirely free from sin, we would, indeed, never be fit to come to this Holy Sacrament.

They, however, receive it unworthily who knowingly and intentionally persist in their sins, such as revengeful wrath, murder, fornication, adultery, and similar manifest sins and crimes. Christ instituted the Holy Sacrament unto the forgiveness of our sins, that we should forsake them and not continue in them. Judas received the Sacrament unto his condemnation and death, because he had determined to destroy the Lord, and did not recede from this his wicked purpose.

Some people are shocked by this example; they know that they are guilty of hatred, malice, and other sins, wherefore they will not come to the Lord's Supper, but postpone it from day to day, and from year to year, simply because they are unwilling to give up their anger and their hatred. Such persons commit a twofold wrong; they cling tenaciously to their sins, and also wickedly despise the command of Christ to partake of His Sacrament. These people should desire to put an end to their wrath and envy, should strive to desist from sin, and should long to obtain, through the reception of the Holy Sacrament, remission of sins and strengthening of their faith. If then there is yet remaining a glimmering of sin and weakness, if now and then evil thoughts and passions make their presence known, we must cry unto God and pray: O Lord, give me a peaceable, kind and loving heart, and cleanse me from my sins, for Christ's sake. Thus can we come to the Supper of the Lord in faith and hope, without being terrified by this saying of St. Paul; for this does not pertain to those who long to be liberated from the bondage of sin, but to those who are therein, and do not desire to be freed, but rather find pleasure in their wickedness and defend their evil deeds. The Corinthians were such people; wherefore the apostle tells them: "I praise you not," indicating that they were not penitent, and yet desired to be praised as good Christians.

The custom prevailing at that time in regard to the Lord's Supper was different from the present. The Christians came together in the evening, and each one ate whatever he had, in the presence of the others. Sometimes it happened that a part ate and drank too much, while others who had nothing suffered want. Such conduct the apostle condemns. He declares it to be damnable, if persons deliberately sin, and then go to the Sacrament as though nothing had happened. They who act thus, eat and drink the Sacrament unworthily, and God punishes them with sickness and other afflictions.

You observe that such wickedness is far greater than the shortcomings of wavering hearts which, seeing the error of their ways, return to the path of duty and earnestly pray: God, we have done evil before Thee; forgive us our manifold sins. Christ will surely pardon them, and invite them to His Supper; He does not invite the self-righteous and saintly, but just these poor sinners, who on account of their guilt are greatly troubled and in sorrow. This He means by the words: "This is my body given for you unto death,

this is my blood which is shed for the remission of your sins.” Surely, they must have been great and guilty sinners for whom such a glorious sacrifice and such a great ransom was offered. The great requirement, therefore, is this: we must discover that we are really sinners, and then come to the Table of the Lord for comfort and relief; but he who will not confess his sins nor amend his ways, should by no means come to this Holy Sacrament.

It is often the case, and strangely so, that those who need not fear, unto whom God is truly merciful and whom He would own as His children, are sorely troubled with fear, whilst those who ought to tremble with terror are entirely unconcerned and think not of their sins, but continue straight on upon their wicked course, as would a rifle ball when once discharged. We see this in the example of the Papists. They scorn and persecute the word of God, put to death the faithful Christians, and force people, in violation of their conscience, to commit idolatry; still they think themselves pious and holy, and are right merry in their delusion. On the other hand, the little company who do not sin intentionally are diffident and affrighted; they lament the sins of which they were once guilty, and wish that they had never occurred. Thus it is, those who might have consolation do not lay hold upon it, whilst they who ought to fear are secure and devoid of every terror.

In reference to this fact the apostle Paul says: “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.” To examine one’s self means to consider well in what condition we are. If we find that our hearts are hardened, that we are not willing to refrain from sin, and that we do not fear its presence, then we may well conclude that we should not go to the Sacrament; for we are then no Christians. The best thing we could do, under such circumstances, would be to put a stop to such wickedness, to repent, to trust faithfully in the promises and mercy of God, and to unite again with Christians in the participation of the Holy Sacrament. If, however, we are unwilling to do this, we ought not to approach the Lord’s Table; for we would surely eat and drink damnation there. Let us carefully meditate upon what eternity has in store for us, if we thus fall under the judgment of God. If we are mindful of this, we will not be slow to repent, to put aside anger and other kinds of wickedness, and to make our peace with God in His Holy Supper. Again, if our hearts are contrite, if we confess our sins before God and are heartily sorry on account of them, if we believe that

God in mercy, for Christ's sake, will pardon us, then we are well prepared and can confidently say unto the Saviour: Lord, we are poor sinners, and therefore come to Thy Table to receive consolation. If we approach the Sacrament in such a spirit, we shall be truly ready and receive the richest blessings. In behalf of such contrite and sorrowing souls the Lord's Table was prepared, so that they might find there consolation and joy. Those, however, who are without penitence, and who continue in their haughtiness and sin, will not be relieved of their fear and will surely be damned. Some of the old teachers in the Church understood this word of the apostle: "Let a man examine himself," as excluding from the Sacrament all persons who are guilty of manifest crimes punished by the civil government, such as murder, adultery, lewdness, and the like. This is a mistake; for, as we have seen above, only those who willfully continue in their sins, and will not amend their lives, are cautioned to refrain from partaking of the Sacrament. These would only augment their account of wrath; for by coming to the Table of the Lord they make a pretended profession of Christian faith, of which not the least symptoms are discernible in their lives.

Whosoever has been guilty of these great sins, and has repented of them, ought not to be deterred by them from seeking absolution and receiving the Lord's Supper. Let him come and pray unto God to give him strength to avoid such wickedness in the future, and to lead a better life. Likewise our infirmities, which daily vex us, ought not to keep us away; for of these we shall never get rid entirely while we live in this world. If it were then our determination not to come to the Sacrament until we were perfectly righteous and pure, we would be compelled to stay away from it forever.

I can speak from my own experience in regard to this, and I know the effects of the avoidance of the Lord's Supper. I was under the influence of this devilish delusion, and became more and more a stranger at the Lord's Table. Avoid this error, my hearers, and see to it that you come often and well prepared; if sin and crime rest heavily upon your souls, forget not then your Lord and Saviour; think of His death and sacrifice for sinners; repent and trust in Him. This, and no more, He requires of us as worthy guests at His Table.

Our great infirmity and daily transgressions, for which we need support and forgiveness, as well as the unity of faith and confession thereby established in the Church, make it an imperative necessity that we should

frequently celebrate and receive the Lord's Supper, thus fulfilling His command: "Do this in remembrance of me." Therefore, whosoever comes to the Table of the Lord as a poor sinner, is yet worthy and well prepared; nor will he eat and drink damnation to himself; but he will receive the body and the blood of Christ worthily, unto his soul's salvation.

May God grant us this blessing through His Holy Ghost, for the sake of Christ Jesus, His Son, our Redeemer. Amen.

Thursday Before Easter. Jesus Washes The Feet Of His Disciples. John 13:1-11. (Translated By Prof. E. Schmid)

Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded. Then cometh He to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto Him, Lord, dost Thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto Him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto Him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all. For He knew who should betray Him; therefore said He, Ye are not all clean. So after He had washed their feet, and had taken His garments, and was set down again, He said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have

done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. John is the only Evangelist who mentions the incident of the washing of the feet of the disciples by Christ; hence it might seem that this occurrence was of but little importance. John, however, introduces it with so much minuteness and care, that we cannot but believe that Christ intended to teach an important lesson by it; for after its performance He admonishes His disciples to observe this example and to wash each others' feet. Hence many Christians still continue this practice. The Papists, however, in this, as in other matters, do not understand the true meaning; they are satisfied with the mere external observance of the custom, and have therefore no benefit from it. Hence it is necessary to preach about this occurrence, and to instruct the people as to its true meaning.

The first part of the narrative, as John gives it, appears somewhat peculiar. He begins thus: "When Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Now, what has all this to do with the washing of feet? How can these words be made to harmonize with the rest of the story? These questions can easily and fully be answered, if we but earnestly consider the whole account. When the Evangelist tells us that Jesus knew that His hour was now at hand to depart from this world unto the Father, he wishes thereby to awaken within us a lively attention to this deed and the lessons which it contains; for this washing of feet happened nearly in the last hour before Christ's departure from this world. Now it is certain that we remember and cherish the last wishes of our dying friends more earnestly and dutifully than any other of their words and deeds; for when it comes to dying, pleasantries and jestings are at an end, and the words then spoken are full of sincerity and earnestness.

St. John would therefore tell us: Listen, you shall hear a story and a lesson important, and well to be remembered; you shall hear of the last deed of Christ and of His final admonition to His disciples, which He began at the washing of their feet and concluded upon His way to the Mount of Olives. These circumstances impress us with the great importance of the

incident recorded in our text; for, surely, if it were of a trifling kind, it would not have occurred in this solemn hour of anxiety and peril.

Again, we must bear in mind that John refers to the “love” which the Lord manifested towards His disciples, in order that we may learn, from this washing of feet, the great condescension of Christ to men, yea, even unto us. Hence we assert the great importance of this incident for the following reasons: It occurred just before His death, and in it He exhibited His great love and condescension. We, therefore, must not slight this deed and its admonition: for when love and mercy prompts the Lord to action, His deeds can not be insignificant.

St. John further exalts this subject when he says: Jesus loved His own which were in the world, that is, the time has now come for the Lord to depart from His disciples, who, while yet in the world, have need of such an example and admonition, lest they be tempted and yield to the allurements of the world. The children of this world are selfish; each one thinks only of himself and his own welfare, no matter how the others may fare. Christ would teach us, by His own example, how we should act towards each other, and avoid this mean selfishness, which is so prevalent. He is the Lord over all, yet He humbles Himself and even becomes a servant to His disciples. Let us learn humility from Him, that we may not fall into the sin of selfishness, but know how to avoid it and be happy.

The Evangelist intentionally records the fact that the devil prompted Judas to betray the Lord, and wishes thereby to teach us, that the Apostles and all Christians are subject not only to the allurements of the world, but are also directly influenced by the devil to selfishness, arrogance and pride. The only available remedy against this evil is to follow the example of Christ, who, just at the eve of His betrayal into the hands of the heathens, gave us yet such an illustrious proof of humility and condescension as is recorded in the incident of the washing of the feet of His disciples.

“To be in the world” means really to be in the midst of devils. It is therefore impossible for us to conduct ourselves aright unless we follow the precepts of the word of God and also this example of Christ. The flesh is averse to all self-denial, and would ever prefer its own supremacy. To counteract such inclination, the Lord gives us here an example to be

remembered and followed. He is filled with true love toward us, and desires to protect us from sin and shame.

The introductory words of the Evangelist to the narrative of the washing of feet are therefore very valuable; they teach us the love and care of Christ toward His people. And yet this account, though read and chanted a thousand times and more, in many a convent and cathedral, is not appreciated nor understood.

But let us proceed. What is the meaning of the words: "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God?" These are important words, indicating the thoughts of our Lord previous to the washing of feet. He evidently did not then meditate upon His approaching passion, nor did He at that time feel sad, as was the case soon after; but He thought of His glory which He had with the Father from all eternity, and which He would now again assume as to His human nature. Such thoughts were sublime, and might well have absorbed His entire attention, to the utter exclusion of the world and every mortal therein.

But even now, while meditating upon His divine glory, He arises suddenly from the table, throws off His outer garment, takes a towel, girds Himself, pours water into a basin, washes the feet of His disciples, and wipes them with the towel wherewith He was girded.

Consider well His thoughts and His deed. He knows and thinks of it that He is Lord God over all; that in less than one day the devil shall have accomplished what he can, and that thereafter all His enemies shall be vanquished and His Christians be at ease. Now turn to His deed, and what is it? Why, this very Lord performs now a task which is commonly done by the servants of the house; He washes the feet of His disciples.

Christ desires us to learn from this occurrence to humiliate ourselves, and not to abuse our position and our power by insolence and arrogance toward our fellow-men, but to help and to serve them with our means as much as we can, even as He Himself, the Lord of glory, became humble and of low estate, yea, even the servant of His disciples. Jesus Himself explains the meaning of the feet-washing when He says: "Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one

another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." Here we see what this feet-washing really means, and that this story is told us that we might imitate its precepts with care and diligence.

The Pope, his monks and priests, also kings and princes, now and then, observe the custom of washing the feet of certain paupers; but of humility in, the performance of this ceremony there is no sign discernible. There are many among them, and that too the more honest ones, who wash the feet of their brothers of the order, or of their subjects, with so little of the spirit of humility, that they afterwards, in the confessional, seek forgiveness for the pride which dwelt in their hearts during the execution of this duty. Why, dear friend, tell me what kind of humility is it if you by this act seek applause and the appearance of saintliness; or what availeth it your brother if you wash his feet to make a display, and to gain glory before the world!

If our bishops would really take to heart the great calamity of idolatry that afflicts the people who have not the true doctrine of the forgiveness of sins, nor know how to obtain eternal life; if they would endeavor to have the true word of God preached and the sacraments administered in their purity, to the exclusion of idolatrous ceremonies, such as the mass, calling upon the saints, sacrifices for the dead, and the like, instructing the people, on the other hand, what the true service of God is, how they should fear Him and love His word, and take consolation from the sacrifice of Christ the Saviour,— then indeed would they act in the spirit of Jesus, when He washed the feet of His disciples. But alas, such a spirit is not to be found in our bishops and rulers; they rather meditate upon an increase of idolatry and false doctrines, and how they can soil the feet of their people still more. Surely, such conduct is against the command of our Lord. May God in mercy remedy the evil and stop the devil's work, who has made the people blind, and rules them as a tyrant does his slaves.

The Papists call this ceremony of feet-washing by a Latin term which means a mandate, a command. But Christ does not mean the outward act when He says: "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet;" for He immediately explains this in the words: "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the

servant is not greater than his lord.” These words are plain enough. If we are honored on account of our position in life, we ought to remain humble and serve our inferiors with such gifts as they do not possess. In full accordance with this, the Lord afterwards gives His mandate concerning love when He says: “A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another.” Now the true nature of love is humility and charity, kindness and compassion. When Christ commands the washing of feet, He requires the presence of such a love. It is Evident that our Lord, by His action in the Gospel, did not intend to teach us the outward washing of feet, which is done by means of Water; for then it would be obligatory to wash the feet of all; or rather, which would certainly be more serviceable, to prepare a regular bath for the people, in which they could wash their whole body. This of course cannot be the meaning of Christ’s command in this regard. He simply gave us by His example an important lesson, that we should be humble, and properly employ the gifts and graces which we have, to the advantage of our brethren, and that we should despise no one, but rather excuse the shortcomings of our fellow-men, and help them to become better.

In this sense, washing of feet must be practiced not merely upon this day, but every day of our life, and we must not grow weary in well-doing towards our fellow-men. For such a purpose, and for such feet-washing, Christ set us the example which we are now considering. Let us remember this.

Those whom God has endowed with much wisdom and honor, and who are called to the office of the ministry, should be especially intent on practicing zealously this feet-washing, that they may not become guilty of abusing the gifts and authority which they have, but employ them faithfully to the service and welfare of the Church. For if our Lord and Saviour, who well knew that the time of exaltation into His eternal kingdom of majesty and grace was approaching, yet humbled Himself so low that in obedience to His Father’s will He gave Himself for us into death, even the death of the cross, how much rather do we poor creatures need such humiliation, we who are tempted by the devil day and night, and who are in constant danger of falling into the meshes of pride, avarice and self-esteem! The devil knows full well that he has gained the field, and is not injured by all our

preaching, if we as servants of the Church forget the command of Christ to be humble, and if we seek after temporal honor and authority.

The Pope's example verifies this assertion. As soon as he turned his attention to the obtainment of worldly glory and power, and began to neglect his spiritual charge, so soon did the Church decay. Secular matters claimed the attention of the Pope, to the exclusion of the true welfare of the Church. The devil succeeded in setting aside the word of God and the true worship, substituting therefor falsehoods and idolatries, which were very lucrative and conducive to the aggrandizement of the priesthood.

I believe that Christ, when he exhibited such humility in washing the feet of His disciples, had in mind the great corruption which, on account of the selfishness and pride of the clergy, would creep into His Church in later years. This great evil began to manifest itself soon after; the bishops wrangled with each other about their relative superiority, and were so at variance with each other that finally Antichrist established himself at Home, and arrogated such supremacy to himself that he not only ruled the Church, but also kings and emperors, and made himself successor of St. Peter and vicar of Christ on earth. This I call a fine way of being humble and of washing feet, after the example which our Lord has given us. Yes, great humility, forsooth!

It was so even then. Judas was not affected by the ceremony of feet-washing, nor by the solemn words of Christ; he meditated all the while how he could betray his Master and get the thirty pieces of silver. The Lord knew this, and was sad on account of such depravity, as the Evangelist tells us. He well knew that Judas was not the only miscreant in this respect, but that he would have a great multitude of followers, who would all be ready to betray and deny their Lord, if they could thereby but obtain the coveted pieces of silver. The knowledge of this fact causes sorrow and pain to the Saviour. He is filled with love and compassion towards all, and is ready to sacrifice His own life for their eternal, happiness, and yet Judas and his horde of disciples care naught for this. They confess that Christ was meek and lowly, that especially by the act of feet-washing He showed His humility and love, but still they will not do as He did; they are proud or account of their station and title in the Church; because they are called Pope, cardinals and bishops they make themselves lords and arrogate to themselves homage from their fellow-men. They would rather betray and

deny Christ a hundred times than to renounce a particle of their authority find glory; it matters little to them if God's word is trampled under foot and souls perish, so they only get wealth and glory among men. The Pope with his fellows is ever busy to crush the pure doctrine and to confirm the former idolatry, which was so greatly conducive to his self-aggrandizement and superiority.

We ought not to be such disciples of Judas, but should ever remember that we are not preachers or officers of the Church to show, our dignity and to be great lords, but to do our duty faithfully and humbly for the welfare of the Church. Thus will we benefit our fellow-men with the gifts which we have, and will be engaged in the proper feet-washing; we will also, in this way, fulfill the command of Christ to His pleasure and honor, and will be enabled to resist more successfully the wiles and snares of the evil one.

The devil makes it his especial aim to render preachers and those engaged in the service of the Church proud and selfish; and if he is successful in this attempt, he has won the contest. They will then be so engaged in temporal matters that Christ, His word, His Church, and their pastoral office, will become of secondary importance to them, or will, perhaps, be entirely forgotten. Examples of such men are plenty, even now.

Let no one think himself exempt from such temptation, but rather practice more zealously than before the virtue of feet-washing. Even St. Paul says: "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." If it was so with the Apostle, how much more are we poor Christians, to whom God has given such high offices, in danger of self-exaltation! Let us take care, therefore, and employ well the various talents which God has granted us; let us exercise pure humility, imitating Christ who, with towel in hand, arises from the table to wash the feet of others, who thinks not first of Himself, but how He may be of service to His brethren.

We are therefore justified in applying this incident of our text chiefly to those who occupy positions of an official kind in the Church, instructing them how sedulously to perform their duties, and how important it is for them to remain in a state of humility. God called them into their various offices, not on their own account, but to benefit their fellow-Christians. It is

their duty faithfully to serve their brethren, and not to complain if their task is perilous and hard.

But all Christians, no matter what their position in life is, should have this spirit of humility. Kings and emperors, though their office is of a secular kind, if they are true Christians, must wash the feet of their people. God did not give them such a high position to live in luxury, lasciviousness and lawlessness, but to make use of their talents for the benefit of their subjects. They should see to it, first of all, that the word of God is preached in their land by faithful ministers, and that idolatry and disturbances of the true worship of God are not allowed. They are accountable to God for the performance of this duty, and cannot expect the divine blessing to rest upon them or their children, unless they are faithful to their trust. How could God be a friend and ally of those who care nothing for His Word, or who force their people into public idolatry and into false devotions?

Again, this feet-washing inculcates earnestness, trustworthiness and zeal in the administration of temporal governments. Rulers must not revel day and night, indulge in the chase and in sports, and inconsiderately oppress the people; it is, on the contrary, their duty to promote peace and happiness throughout the land, to defend the inhabitants against domestic and foreign enemies, and to enforce equal rights to all. If kings and rulers would only practice this kind of feet-washing, it would keep them busy, not alone on this festive Thursday, but through the entire year; yea, it should keep them awake many a night, when others rest, who have not so great a responsibility upon themselves. They must attend to the affairs of Church and State, and thus have their hands more than full, if they wish to do their part assiduously and well.

But what we said above in regard to Judas and the Pope is also true in this connection. The real, feet-washing is generally neglected, that is, the rulers disregard the true welfare of their people, and think they can satisfy them with feasts and public demonstrations, which however avail nothing. It is no great thing to wash one's own feet or those of a friend; but to enforce justice, to defend the truth in doctrine and public worship, is not every one's business, nor is every one capable of doing it, but only they whom God has called to such important offices.

In the lower vocations of life the same practice ought to prevail. The master and the mistress of a family wash the feet of their children and servants, if they treat them kindly and attentively, and if they bring them up in the fear of God and ready to do His will. Husband and wife wash each other's feet if they exercise a forbearing spirit towards each other, avoiding anger and inconsiderate scolding. Servants wash the feet of their employers if they are pious, honest, diligent and obedient, and if they receive even reprimands in a spirit of meekness, knowing that in the end they are benefited thereby.

In short, if you enjoy a peculiar blessing and gift, which your fellow-man has not, employ these to his benefit, no matter who you are or what your position in life may be. Be not arrogant, and despise not him who is less gifted than you are. This is the proper feet-washing which God commanded us to observe.

It is true, and you will find that it is, such feet-washing is not as easy as that sham observance of the custom, in which an abbot or a prior washes the feet of his monks, or in which a bishop performs this task for his chapter. There is no real humility in these cases; for they who wash the others seek their own honor thereby, and expect still greater homage from the recipients of their condescension. You must perform this task in a different sense and manner, by humbling yourself in such a way as to be ever ready to assist others who have not the gifts which you have. This will demand a precious victory over the old Adam within us, who seeks his own honor and exaltation, and is always more prepared to exercise vengeance and oppression than to do good toward others.

Again, we must understand by the term "feet-washing" a disposition which not only willingly serves others in a humble spirit, but which is also ready to forgive the failings of the brethren, as St. Paul says: "Bear ye one another's burdens." For it is simply a fact that in the wide world we will never find a Christian so blameless and perfect as to be entirely free from every fault and blemish.

this one gives way to anger, the other is despondent and morose, the third too boisterous and frivolous, the fourth too niggardly and close, the fifth too free and easy. In one word, as even the heathens remarked: Each one has his load which others must help to bear.

We are often inclined to think: If only our neighbor had not this or that failing, we would gladly associate with him; but his many faults seem to us insufferable and repulsive. Let us bear in mind, whenever we observe such shortcomings in our husband, wife, child, servants, neighbors and others, that we have an excellent occasion for feet-washing. Let us do it then; that is, let us bear with mildness such infirmities, and seek to relieve others of them, always aware that this world is really a filthy cesspool, which we cannot pass without soiling our feet. This happens to me and to you, and to every one. Should we therefore run away into deserts and solitudes, and associate with no one, as formerly the monks did? No, it is a Christian duty to wash the feet of others, we must stay where they are. We must be among the people who wade through unclean, filthy places. We must unbend our proud reserve, and though our feet should be clean and pretty, it behooves us to carry water, rags, soap and brush to cleanse and wash the feet of those who need such ablution.

To do this we must obey the word of the Apostle and “bear one another’s burdens”; we must right willingly assist the weak and needy, exercise patience and compassion, give them our hand for a support, and instruct and guide them to a purer and better life. If we are prudent, wise and learned, we ought therefore not to despise the simple and silly, but should so much the more exercise our skill to help them and to improve their condition.

If we are pious, chaste and temperate let us not judge others harshly who have not such virtues, but let us strive to turn them from their evil way and lead them to do what is right. If we have not the faults which we notice in our brother, let us thank God that it is so; but at the same time we must not forget that we may have other failings which need patience and assistance from others. On the other hand, our neighbors have gifts with which they can help us in our infirmities; and even if they should be unable to help us even in the least, they are still our neighbors, whom we should treat with Christian love, as God has commanded us. If we act thus, we may succeed in gaining him who otherwise is stubborn and perverse, unless he be like this Judas, so entirely possessed of the devil, that he will not heed our advances. Let harmony and friendship prevail among us as much as possible, and to this end let us exercise the spirit of humility. What a pleasant, quiet, Christian life we could lead, if we would only be ready ever to wash each other’s feet! The one would assist and defend the other; we

would all exercise patience and mildness and have no other aim but to make each other happy. Then might we be comforted by the assurance that we had, to some extent at least, complied with the command of Christ, and might appropriate the word of our Lord: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." But if we are derelict in the performance of our duty in this regard, we will feel a piercing sting in our hearts and be unhappy people, devoid of grace and joy.

As we have said, this feet-washing is a bitter task for our old Adam. He desires the services of others, but will make no similar returns. He is also much offended if he finds no thanks for his favors. But we must continue the feet-washing, the well-doing toward others, though they prove ungrateful. To do this we need not only perseverance, but chiefly patience and humility, divine gifts which we must seek in earnest prayer.

From this we learn what this feet-washing means; it teaches an humble, friendly and Christ-like spirit, which Christians should, under all circumstances, manifest in their intercourse with each other. The Lord desires to direct our thoughts to the necessity of humility and condescension; therefore He performed this ceremony of feet-washing shortly before His death. No matter what our ability may be, we dare not boast on account of our great endowments, but must reason thus: By giving us greater gifts than others, God meant that we should employ them in the service of others, and that we should cultivate so much the more a spirit of lowliness, and thrust the devil aside with his promptings to pride and arrogance. If we yield to him and become filled with self-esteem, we are lost; we are then no longer disciples of Jesus, but of Judas, as is the Pope and his crowd.

The Lord, however, wishes to teach us, just here, another and more important lesson in regard to His person. When Peter refuses to be washed, Jesus answers him: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." In these words Christ refers not to the external washing of the feet, but to the washing from sin by His blood shed upon the cross, which washing still is efficacious among the believers in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Such washing is no example; for we can cleanse neither ourselves nor others from sin. The Son of God, the Lamb of God, who bore the sins of the world, can do it, and He alone. They who are washed of Christ confess that God in mercy, through His Son, pardoned and forgave their sins, and

therefore they are ready to forgive the wrong which others may have done unto them, as Christ teaches Matt. 18, and as we pray in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

It is therefore evident that we should practice this feet-washing during our whole life. Christ set us the example shortly before His death, and He did it through love of us, for He knew how we must dwell in an unclean world. May God grant us His Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus His Son, that we may ever bear in mind this admonition, and may fashion our life accordingly. Amen.

Sermons On The Passion Of Christ. Introductory Meditations. (Translated By Prof. E. Schmid)

In this season of the year it is customary for the Church, both in her hymns and sermons, to dwell especially upon the passion of Christ. We also will follow this custom. Indeed, we consider it very appropriate that the narrative of the sufferings of our Lord should, at a certain fixed period of the year, be read in the churches to the people, word for word, from beginning to end, and that it be fully explained to them, so that they may understand its use, and derive from it much consolation. It is sadly evident with what effect the devil resists the Gospel, though it be preached daily, and how the hearts grow cold towards it, so that they do not amend, but rather grow worse from year to year. This distressing fact ought surely to prompt us to continue in the preaching of the Word, and especially of that part of it which tells of the suffering and death of Christ. We must endeavor to have the people know and appreciate this part of the Gospel; nor dare we be derelict in the performance of this duty. If we would neglect to preach on this subject one, two or three years, the people would surely forget it. Even we, who continually busy ourselves with the Word, experience a decrease of interest in it if we neglect the perusal of it for a day or two; how great then would be the injury to the people at large, if they should miss the preaching of these truths for a year or two? They would become as wild as beasts; therefore it is so urgent that we preach and teach the Word in season and out of season. The devil is ever active in resisting the efficacy of the Word, else there would be many believers, and people would be converted; for surely it is now preached often and clearly.

For the Papists this week is one of torture; they sing and read and preach exceedingly much concerning the passion of Christ. But what does it avail them? It is true, they speak of Christ's sufferings; but in their heart there is no thought of them, or else they would not prize so highly their own self-inflicted penances and their own works. But it is not much better with us, who have the pure Gospel abundantly preached to us; our lives and deeds indicate that we also have disregarded it. The effects of the preaching of the Word are therefore not the same with all, inasmuch as not all are disposed to receive it. If we were to relate to the people some idle tales and stories, they would remember them at once; whereas now, thousands upon thousands hear repeatedly the preaching of the Gospel without retaining it, and without profiting by its instructions. They come back from church just as they went there. They hear the Word, but disregard it as something common and unimportant.

There are some, on the other hand, who hear it gladly when they are told Christ rendered satisfaction for us, and that by our own merits and works we cannot obtain salvation, but that Christ alone has purchased it for us by His sufferings and death; but as soon as they are told that to enjoy the benefits of this atonement they must avoid avarice, worldly-mindedness, gluttony, self-esteem, etc., they are displeased and become enraged. They are unwilling to be rebuked on account of their sins, or to be regarded as Gentiles. Here, also, it is the devil who labors to make the Word of no effect, and we cannot expect any thing else but such aversion to the application of the truth. It behooves us so much the more, to continue steadfast in the Word, to the glory of God and to our own souls' salvation, that some may learn to love it, although many are indifferent, and that thus the sacrifice of the Son of God in our behalf may be known and remembered.

The preaching of this truth began in Paradise, when it was said to Adam and Eve that the seed of the woman should crush the head of the serpent. The Church has retained the proclamation of this Gospel, and will retain it until the end of time. Nor can we perform any better service than to proclaim everywhere, in the church, from the pulpit and at home, this fact of the sacrifice of God for the redemption of all mankind.

As Israel was heavily burdened with the ceremonial law, and was compelled to sacrifice calves, heifers, etc., thus the papacy still conducts its

divine worship. If we had to observe all those ceremonies and defray all the expenses incident to them, I fear there would be many complaints of insufferable burdens. But not much is required of us: only this pleasing service, that we should remember His boundless mercy, manifested in the sacrifice of His Son for our sins, and that we should preach this and teach it to our children. Let us thank God if we can enjoy such divine service, which surely will not be useless, but will rather bring forth glorious fruits and many blessings unto men.

The Turks have lost this kind of worship; they have forgotten Christ and substituted Mahomet in His place. The Jews have also rejected Him. Nor is it much better in Germany, where people have become weary of this worship and neglect it. But we may depend upon it that as soon as this true worship is lost, so soon will punishment follow. If we refuse to worship God, when we need only to hear a sermon which tells us of the suffering and death of Christ for us, we need look for nothing else but that, as a well merited penalty, another more severe, and withal an ineffective kind of worship will be imposed upon us. Therefore we ought to preach and hear, right willingly, of the passion of our Lord, so that we may never forget its blessings, even though Satan, the old enemy of truth, may busily attempt to resist and crush the Word.

But again, our own wants require that this be done. As long as we live in this world our flesh and blood will burden us, even as would the weight of a millstone. On every side we are subjected to temptations which take possession of our thoughts and time, so that we forget Christ and His sufferings; earthly possessions, worldly honor, food, drink, carnal indulgences, misfortunes, sickness and adversity are all, more or less, apt to have such an effect upon us. Hence it is necessary to set apart an especial season for the service of God. The devil is ever on the alert to insinuate all kinds of wickedness into our hearts, and would fain make them as cold as ice. Where God's Word is not repeatedly proclaimed in sermons, in hymns, in private conversation, so that we may not forget it or become callous towards it, there it is impossible for our hearts, which are burdened with many an earthly pain and sorrow, with wicked purposes and the devil's malicious instigations, not to fail and to fall from Christ. Thus it is an urgent necessity that the preaching of the Gospel continue among us, that we may hear and retain it, otherwise we would soon forget our Lord.

Nor should we overlook the wants of our young people, who need instruction so much; and many mechanics, laborers, and servants, who are Christians by baptism, cannot even read. Much zeal and energy is needed, that these people may be taught that which they know not, but which is so important to their welfare. God cannot be satisfied with us, if we disregard the precious treasure which He has given us; if we, perhaps, hear the preaching of the Word and gape at it without learning anything. Nor will the devil desist from his attempts to cause us to do what is evil. If we will not hear, nor learn, nor remember the word of truth, we will be condemned to listen to and heed the falsehoods of the devil, unto our souls' eternal damnation. The Papists, the Turks, the Jews, and Anabaptists are examples of this. Let us, therefore, never grow weary of the proper worship of God; let us readily hear and heed the sermons preached on the passion of Christ.

The Benefits accruing from the Passion of Christ.

Of these St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, 5 chap., thus writes: "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."

To preach the passion of Christ our Lord properly, it is not sufficient to read the narrative to the people, but we must add admonition and instruction, that they may realize and remember why Christ suffered thus, and in what way they are benefited by His passion. The method pursued by the Papists, especially by the monks, in presenting this truth, and which was only calculated to arouse the emotions of the people and to fill them with pity and lamentation, must be rejected as utterly useless. He who could stir up the emotions of people best was considered the most effective passion-preacher. Hence we find in those sermons principally railing against the Jews, descriptions of the lamentation of the Virgin Mary when she saw the death of her Son, and the like. All this, however, is nothing but hypocrisy, as really all worship in the papacy is; the true spirit of devotion is wanting, and there are no fruits of amendment there. If we attentively consider the preaching of the apostles and prophets, we shall find a totally different

method of preaching on the passion of our Lord. They did not waste words on the simple story of the event, but presented it unadorned, pointedly and briefly. But of the meaning of this passion, and how it is effective for us if properly applied, – of this they spake repeatedly and much.

It was indeed a short sermon, if merely the words are counted, when John spake of Christ: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world;” but if we carefully meditate upon these words, we will discover how much they contain for our edification and comfort, if we but receive them in true faith.

John calls the Lord a “Lamb,” because He was to be slain, even as a victim is slain. All the sacrifices of heifers, oxen, calves and lambs, which took place under the Old Testament, were but types of that perfect and only efficient sacrifice, which Christ our Saviour offered to redeem the whole world through His own blood. To this the Evangelist refers in the above words, in which he dwells but incidentally upon the narrative of the passion itself. He calls Christ not merely a lamb, but “the Lamb of God,” to express thereby the truth that God Himself had instituted this sacrifice, and would be well pleased with it. This expression, “Lamb of God,” is further intended to arouse our faith to accept such a sacrifice, which God in His infinite mercy and love has made for our salvation. Yea, by it we are to be convinced that because God Himself ordained this sacrifice, it is really perfect and all-sufficient to accomplish what these words say, “namely, to take away the sin of the world. In this expression,”sin of the world,” is included all impiety and injustice which prevail in the world, and which cause the dreadful, but just wrath of God. Now all this wrong God has in mercy taken from the world, and has imposed it upon His Son, who paid our debt for us, that we might be exempt from fear and punishment.

We learn from this example how to preach rightly on the passion of Christ. We should not dwell chiefly upon the historical incidents connected with it, such as the betrayal, the scourging, the mockery, and the crucifixion of Christ; all this we ought to know and to preach; but this is not the most important lesson of the passion of Christ. Above all we must know and believe, as John preaches, that Christ suffered on account of our sins, which God cast upon Him, and which He bore in obedience to His Father’s will and from love toward us. If we know this; if we understand our sinful condition, which would have plunged us without escape into eternal

damnation, had not Christ become our Saviour, we will duly appreciate . the importance and value of the suffering of our Lord, and will be comforted thereby when fear of God's wrath, on account of our sins, would overcome us. Such a consideration of the passion of Christ will not only move our eyes to tears and our hearts to pity, as is the tendency of the popish sermons on this subject, but will prompt us to feel, deep down in our soul, sorrow at the terrible results of sin, for which no creature, but only the Son of God could make atonement by His sufferings and death; and likewise it will cause us great joy, because we will realize that this sacrifice was made for us, that God will now no longer reject nor condemn us, as we have merited by our sins, but that He is now reconciled to us through the precious and vicarious death of His Son, who gave Himself as a victim in our behalf, so that our sins are now forgiven and we are made heirs of eternal life.

The Papists never preached thus of the passion of Christ. They also used the words "Lamb of God" as applied to Christ who took away the sin of the world, but their whole worship was arranged as if each individual had to bear his own sin and must make atonement for it himself. How else can we understand the stringent regulation in the Romish Church, especially in this season of the year, in regard to fastings, penances, self-inflicted tortures and other severe and burdensome works? Why were people so much in terror in regard to the minute, outward confession of their sins? Why did they bury themselves day and night in the churches and chapels, engaging in song and prayers? Wad it not because they supposed that by such doings and observances they could and must work out forgiveness of their sins? Such doings mean in reality that we cannot rely, fully and solely, upon the sacrifice of Christ as all-sufficient and effective, and that We must with our own work complete the sacrifice and the atonement.

This contradicts directly the statement of John the Baptist, yea of Christ Himself, when in John 12. He thus speaks of His sufferings: "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground And die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." In these words Christ declares that His sufferings shall abound in much fruit. It would be erroneous to claim that a Christian must first of all bring forth good works, even as the branch and the vine bringeth forth grapes; this would indeed be one of the fruits of Union with Christ through faith, but the most important fruit is indicated in

the words of the Lord Himself when He says: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me;” that is, through me, through my sacrifice, through my death upon the cross, men must come to the Father and receive eternal life. They who rely on their own works, and desire by means of them to enter heaven, pervert the plan of salvation; they draw Christ down to them, whereas the reverse should take place: Christ must draw us to Him, or everything is lost. He alone has vanquished the devil, paid the penalty of our sins, rescued us from the World and death, and brought us to life through His sufferings and death. To all this we contributed nothing.

Again, John 3. chapter, Christ preaches of His passion hr this wise: “And as Moses lifted up the Serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” This is sufficiently plain. Whosoever desires to have eternal life, must obtain it through faith in Christ and His death upon the cross, Wherewith He made payment for our sins and redeemed us from death and hell. In the words just cited, Christ mentions no work of man as efficient unto justification; He says nothing of alms, fastings and the like. The requirement of deeds came already through Moses, and in the ten commandments God laid down the rules of conduct to be observed by us, and whosoever disregards them may expect the wrath of God and His punishments. He, however, who keeps the law, and fulfills its demands as much as he can, does not on that account get to heaven. There was no other remedy for the Jews in the wilderness, when bitten by the fiery serpents, but to look up to the brazen serpent which God had ordered to be made. In like manner, as Christ indicates in this passage, there is no other way unto salvation but faithfully to look unto Him who sacrificed Himself, according to the will of God, for our sins, and through whom we now have pardon and eternal life. Such a glorious result has the death of Christ; our works do not accomplish it, as the Papists falsely teach; they have nothing to do with it.

The prophets also frequently speak similar words. Thus Isaiah, 63. chapter, says: “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.” Surely, this is a most charming and comfortable passion-sermon,

yea no apostle in the New Testament could preach one to surpass it. The prophet declares that Christ shall be stricken, smitten and afflicted in our behalf, and also that the chastisement of our peace shall be upon Him, and that with His stripes we are to be healed. Isaiah calls the Lord a physician, and directs us to Him to be healed in our distress and sickness, so that we may obtain health and happiness. The Lord has a remedy for us which is not labeled good works, giving of alms, fastings and rosaries, but consists of the fact that He suffered and died for us, yea, that He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. If therefore the history of the passion tells us how our blessed Lord and Saviour was tortured by the Jews and the Gentiles, we ought to be mindful that all this happened that we, even we, might have a cure, not from bodily infirmities, but from a sickness more dreadful than all the rest, namely, from sin and eternal death. Thus the history of the passion will be applied by us properly and happily. It must, however, be borne in mind that the passion of Christ is in two ways a precious and sure remedy. It exhibits, in the first place, sin in all its ugliness and terror; no human being, not an angel, nor any other created being, had the power to take away sin; the Son of God alone could do it, and He did carry this crushing weight for us. We should therefore carefully and earnestly endeavor to avoid sin, in the fear of God, for it is so very easy to fall into it, and so very difficult to get out of it again. In this endeavor we will be mightily assisted by the consideration of the passion of Christ, which will prompt us, as a precious power against sin, to be pious and to shun evil, since it is such a terrible and dreadful burden, which no created being can remove, and which the Son of God had to carry for us. In the second place, we find in the passion of Christ a rescue from death; for he who fully believes that the Son of God died for his sins and paid his debt before God, can have a peaceful heart and need not fear death, but will trust in the mercy of God and hope for eternal salvation. Of this consolation the prophet (section missing from original text —Ed.) prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the stronghold ye prisoners of hope," etc. The pit, the prison-house of men, is sin and its punishments, namely, the tyranny of the devil and eternal death. From this pit we could not rescue ourselves unless by the help of God; not through the blood of heifers and similar victims, but only through the blood of the just One, the King of Salvation. He who is not in the covenant of this blood must remain in the pit of sin and eternal death, while he who is

enrolled in it through faith shall surely come out from this pit of wrath to the enjoyment of the mercy of God and unto eternal life.

Daniel also preaches of this, in the 9. chapter: “Seventy weeks are determined upon Thy people and upon Thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sin, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness,” etc. How this should be fulfilled in the death of Christ, the prophet soon after indicates. This is another clear and definite declaration of the truth, that forgiveness of sins and justification can be obtained only through the death of Jesus Christ; through it, if we accept it in faith, we have this precious treasure, and in no other way can we obtain it. Thus we can learn from John the Baptist, from Christ Himself, and from the prophets, how to preach of the passion of our Lord, namely, to instruct the hearts as to the mercy and grace of God, that they may be comforted thereby. Christ suffered for the payment of our sins, to reconcile us to God, and to save us through faith in Him as our lord and Saviour.

The holy Apostles preached the same truth concerning the passion of Christ, as we can easily read in their narratives and writings. Of the many passages bearing upon this point we will now, in conclusion, notice but the one taken from Romans 5. chapter, as you, my beloved, have heard it in the beginning of this discourse. This passage is sufficiently plain, so that all can understand it. Nevertheless we will now dwell upon it somewhat, to our instruction, edification and comfort.

We all experience how deeply unbelief is rooted in our hearts, so that we are ever troubled by our sins, and lack all assurance and peace. We are so ready to exclaim: Ah, if we were only more pious, it would be better for us, and we could then hope for the mercy of God. Where the heart thus wavers, there is surely trepidation and uneasiness. But if we firmly believe, and rely on the mercy of God, which He has promised in Christ, our hearts will be securely stayed in all adversities upon this consolation, and will indeed be happy and of good cheer.

People, however, are perverse in this. The Pope has therefore established all manner of worship, by means of which, as he pretends, confidence in God and reliance on His help can be gained. Some of these inventions are worship of the saints, pilgrimages, the purchase of indulgences, the mass,

vigils, monastic life, and other similar delusions. Such observances are regarded as guarantees of a renewed life and of heaven. This is indeed a deep-rooted delusion, and an earnest preacher of the truth will direct his efforts chiefly against it, to tear from the hearts of the people, by the grace of God, this wicked unbelief and to instill into them true confidence and faith. How to do this properly, and with success, St. Paul teaches us in the passage under consideration; and, surely, his testimony is of great weight, as of one who was a great preacher, chosen a id called of God Himself as a giant in the work of spreading the Gospel. We ought, therefore, attentively to heed his words.

He begins with the remark: "God commendeth his love toward us," which is indeed a peculiar and astonishing saying, but nevertheless, as we shall presently hear, a remarkable, precious truth. God, it is true, is the declared enemy of sin, and will punish it, as the law demands and as our daily experience proves. Again, it is true that we are all sinners, and this knowledge causes our unbelief of the mercy and love of God. When told, as in the passage before us, that God loves man, we think immediately of John the Baptist, of Peter, of Paul and others, who were so much more pious than we, and are ready to admit that God may love such as these, but we deny that we are such people as He can love, and therefore continue in fear of His wrath. Against this misconception the Apostle directs his words when he says that God doth not only love us, but that He even commendeth His love toward us; that is, God makes it so manifest, so sure and evident that He loves us, that no man can doubt it. What else but love could prompt Him to send His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into this world, to die for us while we were yet sinners? When therefore sin and doubt torment us, and would rob us of confidence in God's mercy and pardon, let us firmly hold to the eternal truth of this word: "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Who is Christ? He is the Son of God. What does He do? He becomes man and dies. Why does He die? On account of sinners. From this it clearly follows that God has not rejected sinners, and that He desires not their destruction, but that He loves them still, even so much that He rescues them from sin and death. For their sake His dear Son goes into death by the will of the Father. What better proof of His love could He have given? Surely, St. Paul has good authority for exclaiming: "God commendeth His love toward us;" and it behooves us to confess the precious, inexhaustible grace of God in Christ, and to believe that He is no longer wroth with us. Indeed,

it would be utter madness to say that God will cast us away in anger, when it is evident that He gave His only begotten Son as a sacrifice for us wicked and forlorn men, that we might be redeemed, and have salvation evermore.

These words of St. Paul agree fully with the saying of Christ, John 3: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” How can one, who knows and believes that God loves him, be afraid of Him? For we all know what the character of love is. It is not contentious nor injurious, but trusts in Him, to whom it is directed, convinced that He will bring help and assistance. It is impossible to be otherwise. We should therefore cultivate this love, and fondly cherish it, nor permit any one or any thing to rob us of it. It is the devil’s especial aim to persuade or force us from this conviction that God loves us; he would fain have us fear God and regard Him as our deadly enemy. Where he succeeds in this attempt he has won the field. If we have lost our confidence in God, what then can defend or support us? Let us therefore resolutely repel all such insinuations of the devil, of sin and our conscience, as if God did not love us, but let us firmly hold to the eternal truth and consolation that, as an assurance of His love, God sent His Son into this world to die for us sinners – to save us even while we were yet sinners. What else is this but a proof that God has thoughts of mercy toward sinners, that He loves them and would help them from their misery? This consolation we derive, as St. Paul here tells us, from the death and passion of Christ, and we should be comforted thereby. When the knowledge of our sins depresses us, when our heart would question the mercy and favor of God, we should be quick to conclude that He cannot be our enemy, since He gave us His only begotten Son as a Saviour. Hence we dare assuredly depend upon His mercy and help, and have no cause of fear or despair.

But perhaps you will say: we know well enough that God gave His Son into death in our behalf, yet we, on our part, have by many transgressions and sins proved ourselves totally unworthy of this His grace and mercy; from which it follows that God has again become our enemy on account of our crimes, though He may formerly have loved us for His Son’s sake. St. Paul tells us that such reasoning is false, and that we should by no means give way to it, for he distinctly declares: “Christ died for us while we were yet sinners.” Remember this, and be comforted by it. These words give us

the explicit assurance, when our sins accuse us and threaten us with God's wrath and dire punishment, that Christ died for no other purpose than to save sinners, and for no other persons. If, therefore! we commit new sins, if our conscience accuses us, and if we have merited anew the vengeance of God, we ought ever to remember that Christ died for us as sinners, – for just such sinners as we are, and shall remain, though we may constantly exercise penitence and faith and new obedience with a good conscience. Yea, though we be ever so saintly, we will always need this consolation, that Christ died for us sinners, as St. Paul says: “Though I know of no sin, I am therefore not justified;” and the Psalmist, Psalm 143: “Enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified.” It therefore remains a fixed fact, eternally unalterable, that the passion and death of Christ took place for our sin, no matter when committed, and while we were yet sinners, and that therefore we are freed from the eternal wrath of God, that we have forgiveness, that the atonement is made once for all, and that we can now obtain eternal life.

St. Paul continues: If God so loved us that He justified us through His blood, and if we earnestly believe that our sins are forgiven for His sake and that we are now pleasing in His sight, we ought to take comfort and rest assured that God will continue to be merciful unto us, and will save us in the end in heaven. He not only sacrificed Himself for us, but His life and victory are ours also.

The Apostle, when he spake these words, had in mind this severe tribulation, even of the pious, when they anxiously fear the wrath of God. He would fain give comfort by the assurance that God has averted His anger, and has employed mercy and grace toward us, even while we were yet sinners. If He did this then, how much less will He be wroth with us now after the redemption from sins by the death of His Son! This is surely a most effective sermon, preached against the unbelief which is so prone to nestle in our hearts. But Paul is not content with this assurance; he speaks of a still greater and more precious consolation to be derived from the death of Christ. He says: “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” Would to God that we might have this comfortable assurance firmly rooted in our hearts. It is indeed an inexpressible deed of mercy that Christ died for sinners; for by His death we are redeemed. If now His death

benefits us so much, should we not also enjoy blessings from His life? If He died in our behalf, and if His death is our gain, we can unhesitatingly rely upon it that His life now will also be of benefit unto us: He will keep us by His grace, and will defend us from the devil and the world, so that our faith may increase from day to day. Accordingly we see, to our edification and consolation, the Apostles directing our attention repeatedly to the joyous resurrection of our Lord Jesus. He who thus liveth after He died for us, will surely attend to our wants now, and will protect us in the true faith against all temptation. The Apostle would therefore encourage us in these words against all doubts and weakness of faith; he would tell us to put aside all terror of the wrath of God and of death, since our Father in heaven has so clearly commended His love toward us in giving His Son for us into death while we were yet sinners. If He did not spare this His most precious gift while we were yet in sin, He will surely bestow all blessings upon us now, since we have been cleansed from sin by the death of Christ.

Through Him and in His life we can have the power necessary to conquer death and hell; therefore we rejoice and trust in God, who loved us so exceedingly while we were yet sinners; yea, we know that for the sake of Christ, His Son, He will support us in our tribulations, and grant unto us in the end eternal life. Such a faith, and such confidence, is the Christian's true worship; we should therefore diligently seek it, pray for it, and retain it in our hearts. The Apostle Paul now concludes his exhortation to be of good cheer with these words: "We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."

He declares that we have received the atonement through Christ. We, on account of our sins, dared not hope for mercy from God. Now this is changed. Our sins are removed by the death of Christ, and we know that God no longer chides with us. He is our Friend, yea, our beloved Father. What then must be the revolt of such reconciliation? This, that we rejoice at such a merciful and loving God – a God who is the source of all love, whom we should praise, and upon whom our whole confidence in every need and sorrow should be placed. If we have God for a friend we need fear no injury; nothing can then terrify or harm us. An atonement has been made for sin; God is satisfied with me, and Christ our Mediator sits at the right hand of the Father. What matters it now if death does come and lay low our bodies, since we know that through Christ we shall rise again unto eternal

life? Hence the Christians ought ever to rejoice, no matter what their fortunes in life may be; though pain may afflict their bodies, they can be glad in the spirit, and will praise their Father in heaven, upon whose love and mercy they depend, and under whose protection they are secure. Such a happy issue from ills we have through the atonement made by the death of Christ.

Hence we see what a horrible crime it is for the Pope and his adherents to disregard this atonement, and to direct the people to do good works and to depend upon human exertions and deeds in obtaining mercy at God And forgiveness of sins; Let us thank God from the very bottom of our hearts that we have been set free from this bondage of error, and that we can learn from so many testimonies of the Old and of the New Testament how to regard, and apply the passion of Christ, so that We are enabled to say, whenever sin accuses: If we were no sinners, Christ need not have suffered for us, but since He did suffer, we will derive all consolation from His passion. Thus will we honor God and give thanks unto Christ our Lord, We can make no other return but to accept with heartfelt gratitude the precious gifts obtained by His passion and death.

If we do this, it must follow, as a necessary consequence that we shun and hate sin, that amid various trials, by constant practice, we increase from day to day in faith, in love, in hope, and in patience. May God bless us in this endeavor, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen!

First Passion Sermon. The Occurrence At The Mount Of Olives. Matt. 26:36-46. (Translated by Isensee)

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And He went a little further, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt. And He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, Thy will be done. And He came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And He left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh He to His disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

This is a beautiful narrative, and presents the true beginning of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus. It is profitable both for doctrine, showing how our Lord conducted Himself in His sufferings, and for consolation in the anguish of sin and an evil conscience.

The scholastics disputed much and diffusely about the events here narrated. It is, indeed, no trifling matter that such great fear, trembling and anguish should take possession of this person, who is, at the same time, eternal God and true man. But let men dispute about this as much as they will, and let them be ever so penetrating and subtle, it can never be fathomed! Yea, it is impossible to comprehend such grief and terror; they are beyond the reach of our minds, and this simply because the person who sustains them is exalted far above all things. We must, therefore, be content with understanding those inferior instances of sorrow or fear which we actually see. Such instances we have in the case of those poor wretches who are condemned to death for their crimes. Before these can become reconciled to their fate, they writhe in death's agony and struggle with death; and, sometimes, they cannot endure such anguish, and are even overwhelmed with fear, so that they can neither hear nor see, and do not understand what is spoken to them nor what they tell others, but are unconscious and even grow stiff, like one who knows neither where he is nor what ails him.

But here we must rather consider those whose grief and anguish are so intense, that they fear and tremble on their account; whose hearts are so pierced with wretchedness and terror that they would rather die than suffer them. Such excruciating pain is experienced by those hearts which wrestle with the fear of God's wrath or the violent onslaughts of despair. We may be assured that such great grief and terror assaulted our Lord on this occasion, so that He stood trembling and quaking before His disciples, who were affrighted and could not conceive what had befallen Him. This is beautifully indicated by Luke where he says that when the Lord "was come to His disciples, He found them sleeping for sorrow;" and here by the Lord Himself in the words: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," that is, I am so full of anguish, that I could die of agony. Our thoughts cannot go beyond this; for we know of no anguish that transcends such anguish unto death. But even the pangs of death cannot properly be compared with the agony of the Lord Jesus; for His was of such exceeding violence that no human heart could have borne it. And for this very reason it declares Christ to have been true man, else it could not have affected Him, and true God, else He could not have borne and conquered it. Our flesh and blood can not endure and conquer thus; human nature, yea, even the nature of angels, is by far too feeble to hold out in such distress. For it

was not the only sorrow of the Lord Jesus that the hour was now at hand, in which He should be betrayed by Judas, taken captive by the Jews, nailed to the cross by the Gentiles, and suffer death; but that the sins of the whole world were upon Him, and that the death He was about to suffer was a death incurred by sin and the wrath of God. Since He became a substitute for us all, and took upon Himself our sins, that He might bear God's terrible wrath against sin and expiate our guilt, He necessarily felt the sin of the whole world, together with the entire wrath of God, and afterwards the agony of death on account of this sin. This is the point which makes it evident that we can neither adequately speak of such sufferings and anguish, nor even meditate upon them. While each of us has merely his own sins upon him, Christ alone bears the sins of all the world and must atone for them with His death. How very insignificant, therefore, the agony of all other men! The sins committed by the whole world, from the first man; Adam, to the judgment-day, are placed upon that one man who was born of the Virgin Mary, while our burden is so very trifling in comparison, and we still break down under it.

But what is this sorrow, anguish and trembling of the Lord to teach us? What benefit are we to derive from His fear and lamentation, and from His public confession that His heart is so filled with misery that He would rather not live? It was stated above that His being terrified at death should teach us that He is a true, natural man, possessing flesh and blood like ours, and that He is altogether of like mind with us, but without sin. For it is an innate quality of our human nature to shudder at the thought of death. But it is impossible that any other mortal should be moved with fear as great as that of the Lord Jesus, because upon Him rests the iniquity of all mankind, and because for this iniquity He must suffer the death which is merited by the sins of the whole human family. This, together with the fact that He really did bear this excessively great burden without succumbing or perishing under it, proves most forcibly that He is also God, and more than a man.

Therefore is this death-struggle a powerful weapon which we wield against the heretics, who teach that Christ was not true God and true man. For we are compelled to confess that both natures of Christ here show themselves mightily; that, while His sorrow and fear and His wrestling with death are a potent declaration of His true, natural humanity, His divine

power is proclaimed by His submission to the will of God, and by His conquering that agony which would have overpowered all men and all creatures.

But this conflict with death, besides being useful for doctrine and the strengthening of our faith, can be profitably employed by us in two other ways. Sin has so blinded and corrupted us poor mortals that we cannot sufficiently discern our own imperfections, else we would diligently guard against transgressions; for we perceive in ourselves and others that we regard sin as but a trifling injury, yea, more, that we delight in it. He who becomes enslaved to pernicious avarice does not hesitate to take twelve or fourteen percent, and would think himself very prosperous if he could obtain a great amount of such usury. Just so it is with him whom Satan makes a slave to debauchery; such a one regards himself most fortunate when he can satisfy his sensual desire, and the gratification of his evil passions is his only ambition. This is the case too with other sins; we rejoice over our imagined success in committing them. All this misery originates in our not knowing what a dreadful calamity sin really is. If we could only comprehend the wrath of God which is revealed against sin, and His judgment which awaits it, we would no longer desire and love sin, but would fear it and flee from it as though it were sudden death.

This picture of our dear Lord's agony at the mount of Olives serves to furnish us with such knowledge and fear. For if we look carefully on this picture we shall behold an image of sin, at sight of which our hearts must recoil with horror. Only look earnestly at the person pictured here. He is the Son of God, – the everlasting Righteousness!

And although He assumed our flesh and blood, His flesh and blood is altogether sinless. Yet, since He took upon Himself foreign sin, namely that of all the world, in order to atone for it, this sin of others so affected Him, filled Him with such grief and anguish, and so terrified Him, that He began to tremble and quake, confessing: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful? even unto death."

Now if the sins of others are able to inflict such agony upon this pious, innocent heart, what must not be the result if our own sins assail our naturally sinful and corrupt hearts, which are inclined to despair! God sometimes gives us instances of this result, that we may lie influenced by

terror; instances, in which sin rages in the soul to such a degree, that the poor miserable wretches destroy their own lives in order to be quickly released from such rackings of conscience. This is a certain sign that such sufferings of conscience are more grievous and intolerable than bodily death, notwithstanding that the latter is most violently opposed to our nature; for these wretched persons regard death as the means by which they can rid themselves of such sufferings. But it is a fatal means; for it is against that commandment of God which tells us, “thou shalt not kill.” These people, therefore, only make themselves more worthy of God’s wrath and of damnation. The proper means, by which we can with certainty get rid of this anguish, we shall consider hereafter.

Therefore, let us study this picture thoroughly, and not forget how our blessed Lord Jesus mourned and trembled at the mount of Olives. We should remember this especially when we are tempted by the devil, our own flesh and blood, or the wicked world, and when we perceive our great propensity to sin. Then let us reason thus: if sin is so mighty that it can affect Jesus Christ, my Lord and God, with the greatest grief, though it be not His own sin, but entirely that of others; how much more will it not tempt, grieve, terrify and oppress me, who am myself guilty of every sin to which I consented, and who can, at any rate, only with the greatest effort resist the fear of death and of the anger and judgment of God! Therefore, get thee hence, Satan, I will not follow thee! Thou makest it easy for me to sin, as though sin were a trifling matter; but in my Lord Jesus I perceive that it is the most intolerable burden, because it so agitated His innocent heart. Therefore this narrative is of great value to us as an admonition to live in the fear of God and to sin no more. And most certain is it, if we bear this picture in mind, and, in accordance with it, persevere in prayer against temptation, that God will mercifully assist us by His Holy Spirit, so that Satan must flee and our flesh be kept under restraint; while they who do not keep this picture in view are led and driven like haltered cattle whithersoever the devil will.

Especially does the prayer Christ offered here serve as such an admonition. These were His words: “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” Now it is evident that this was not possible; for it was necessary that He should offer up His body for the sins of the whole world, and die upon the cross. But what else is to be inferred from this, than that

sin is such a great and terrible transgression that it was impossible for any creature to afford the least relief from the curse? But if we were to be delivered from this, it was necessary for the eternal Son of God to become man and to suffer death upon the cross for our sins; thus only could we become free from sin.

Therefore, again from this should we learn to know and judge sin correctly. If we desire to obey our own hearts and the devil, and to follow the example even of the world, it will be very easy for us to commit adultery and fornication, and to seek to profit by covetousness, by the practice of usury, and by extortion. We see this in the case of those who fall into such temptations that they can never get enough of sinning. O, do not serve your own heart, Satan and the world; let not the smooth fur deceive you, for it surely covers sharp, poisonous claws, and should these seize you it is all over with you, unless God succor you in an extraordinary way! For if sin could, in the manner we have related, assail and terrify Christ, who never was guilty of a single sin, what will become of you and me, whom sin has, at any rate, previously so corrupted that we can not do otherwise than fear, tremble and despair and fly from God, as did Adam and Eve in Paradise! Therefore, let us be on our guard, and not run wantonly into such danger. Let us ask God for His Holy Spirit, that He may assist us, – that we may by His help defend ourselves against sin. If we do this, we shall be indeed the better for the scene at the mount of Olives.

Let us proceed. Even aft this scene has been employed by us as an admonition to fear God and to guard against sin, so does it serve, in the second place, for our consolation. No man is able so carefully to govern himself that his flesh and Satan will not succeed sometimes to mislead him with their clamor, so that he makes a mistake and falls into sin. And Satan incessantly prowls around the Christian for the special purpose of leading him into public offenses, as we can see in the case of illustrious saints. How deeply David fell! And Peter the same! Now if this should happen to us also, and Satan should then come and harass our hearts by his representations of our sin, then we should again behold this picture of the mount of Olives, and turn our thoughts inward and say: O God, why is it that Jesus Christ, my Lord, Thy Son, trembles so? What is it that troubles Him? He prays that the cup might pass from Him. What is this cup? It is the bitter death upon the cross and nothing else. But why does He suffer this

death, being without sin, holy and righteous? Alas, this is brought about by the sin of the world, which God has placed upon Him; this it is that oppresses and alarms Him!

But how must I apply this? what must I contemplate here? This will I consider here, and believe that it is true: if God has placed my sin upon Him, then am I most certainly released from sin; and because this is so, John the Baptist calls Him “The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” What accusation could I now bring against myself and my dear Lord Jesus? True, I am a sinner; I experience, alas! that my sins alarm me and that they always try to make me sad; I am afraid of God and His severe judgment. Nevertheless, of what could I accuse myself; and how could I censure my dear Lord Jesus? He trembles at the mount of Olives, and feels such anguish that His sweat is as it were great drops of blood; my sins, which He has taken upon Himself, and whose heavy burden He has borne, have brought Him to this. Therefore, I shall leave them there, and firmly hope that when I shall appear before God and His judgment, God shall find no sin in me. Not as though I were pious and had committed no sin, but that God Himself has taken away from me my iniquity and laid it on His Son. Isa. 53.

Thus the scene at the mount of Olives also serves for our consolation; it assures us that Christ has taken our sins upon Himself and rendered satisfaction for them. For how could we otherwise account for such fear and trembling? If our sins, therefore, rest upon Christ, we can be content; they are in the right place, – just where they belong. Upon us they do not lie well; for we and all men, yea and all creatures, are too weak to bear a single sin: it would crush us with its weight. Therefore, let them remain upon Christ, and see what happens Him on their account. He takes them to the cross with Him and even dies in consequence of them; But on the third day He appears as the Lord of sin, death and the devil; for they attacked Him with all their powers, but accomplished nothing. Now this should be our comfort, and we should thank God for the unspeakable grace, by which He removed from us the heavy burden which would have hurled us into the abyss of hell, and placed it upon His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who, although He was sinless and God eternal, still toiled and drudged under it at the mount of Olives, until the bloody sweat flowed gently from Him. To this comfort let us cleave, and not permit sadness to oppress our hearts, but

say: it is sufficient that my Lord Jesus mourned and trembled so; my lamentations can accomplish nothing. But if I make His agony my comfort, and on it base my hopes in life and death, then has He so labored for me with His griefs and fears that I must in future be joyful in Him and of good cheer, and not fear sin and death, but hope for God's grace and eternal life. Such exercise of faith and comfort in Christ is the true worship of God, pleasing unto Him; and since this exercise is the only means, by which we can worship God truly, poor, troubled consciences should make use of it whenever the burden of sin tortures and alarms the heart. Otherwise it is impossible to find any true, certain consolation in such misery.

But this history of the scene at the mount of Olives is also of use to us in teaching us, by Christ's example, how to conduct ourselves in times of fear, temptation and distress. The hour was now at hand when Judas should betray, the Jews capture, and the Gentiles crucify Christ. What does He do? He is "exceeding sorrowful" and full of fear. But this is not all. "He went a little further, and fell on His face, and prayed." We too must learn this; we dare not let trouble so affect us that we forget to pray. For it is also a necessary part of divine worship and pleasing to God, not to despair in anguish and distress, but, when these attack us, to lift up our hearts to Him, and seek His help. The 91. Psalm testifies to this, where God says: "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him." But this is very difficult for us; for we imagine, when God suiters anxiety and distress to come upon us, that He is angry with us and is our enemy; and, therefore, even if we do pray, we think that our prayers are vain and useless. But against this we can employ the comfort of Christ's agony, and thus drive back such thoughts. For if God were always angry when He suffers pains and distresses to come upon us, it would follow that He was angry with His dear Son. But the reverse is the case, as Solomon also says, namely, that the father scourgeth every son whom he receiveth, and whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth. Therefore, let no such thoughts deceive us; let us not regard God as an enemy because He permits us to suffer. We see here that He does not exempt His only begotten Son from suffering, but permits Him to feel sin and the agony of death, and to fear and tremble on their account. We should believe that God deals with us in the same way; that we are His children and that He desires to remain our Father, notwithstanding that He lets us suffer it little. For why would we be spared all those things, from which He did not exempt even

His Only Begotten, whom He permitted to suffer that agony for us which we would have had to suffer forever in hell? Therefore, let us still follow Christ, and as we endure fear and distress with Him, even so let us learn to pray with Him, and doubt not that God will graciously hear our prayers!

And how did Christ pray? The prayer itself is a very useful and necessary pattern, which we should imitate, and never leave out of sight. He prays: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." This petition He repeats three times, until finally, as Luke says, "there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him."

Now this is the model prayer which we too should use in temptation and trouble. "O my Father," He prays, as though He would say: although my present anguish and alarm are so great that they make me exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, and that I see nothing before me but Thy terrible wrath, and death; still I do not doubt that Thou art my Father, that Thou dost love me, that Thou dost behold me and care for me. Therefore, I hope to be released from this agony. "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" that is, help me, and save me from these sufferings.

Even as Christ calls upon God, His Father, so must we also do. For, although He alone is the eternal Son of God, according to the 2. Psalm: "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee," yet we too are children and heirs of God by faith in Christ Jesus. We should, therefore, not merely titter these words in our prayers, but be fully confident that God, as our Father, desires our welfare, and will not forsake us, His children. For where such trust is wanting, there can be no sincere prayer, and there surely the thought is entertained that God is not our Father, that He does not want us, and that He is not concerned about us. But this is dishonoring God and robbing Him of His right name, "Father."

But let us learn still another lesson. Our dear Lord Jesus prays that His Father would let this cup pass from Him, and, as the true only begotten Son, He expects everything good of His Father. Yet He adds these words: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Let us do the same. Let us not on account of temptation and affliction think that God is angry with us; but turn to Him as the child turns to its father; for, because we believe in Christ, God will accept us as sons and as joint heirs with Christ; and let us

call upon Him for help, saying: O blessed heavenly Father, see how hard it goes with me in this or that respect, – help, for the sake of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, – suffer me not to remain in this distress or to sink under it, and so on. With this God is well pleased. And it is His desire that we all, in every need, have such confidence in Him, in and through Christ; that we, firmly relying upon Him as our dear Father, call upon Him; and that we do not doubt at all that He, for Christ’s sake, will not only be merciful to us as His dear children, but also heartily sympathize with us and therefore willingly help us. Still we must humble ourselves, and not insist upon having our will, but submit it to the will of God whether we shall still continue in misery; and, if this is His will, show our obedience by patiently bearing such a delay of deliverance, as we can see that Christ here did.

But the question might here occur to us: why does Christ here pray thus, while in His prayer in the 17. chap, of John He does not use a single word which implies that He commits the decision, whether He shall obtain His request or not, to the Will of God? There He says: “Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son. O Father, glorify Thou me. Keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me. I pray that Thou shouldst keep them from the evil. Sanctify them through Thy truth.” Also: “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am,” etc. This entire prayer shows that He will have His request granted and not denied. But why does He not pray in the same way here? Answer: the want, for which the Lord prays here, is a temporal, bodily want. Now we must, in all things pertaining to this bodily life, submit our will to that of God; for, as Paul says, “we know not what we should pray for.” It is, besides, often necessary for us that God should leave us under the cross and in distress. Since God alone knows what is good for us, we should prefer His will and renounce our own, rendering obedience with patience.

When, however, bodily affairs are not the subject of our prayer, but eternal blessings, God’s will is manifest and unalterable; it is His will that all men should be saved, that they should acknowledge their sin and believe in its forgiveness through Christ. Such eternal blessings we receive when God pardons our iniquity, upholds us by His Word, sanctifies us, and gives us the Holy Spirit and everlasting life; and such blessings as these it is that Christ implores for the Christian Church in John 17. Therefore, when praying for such heavenly, eternal gifts, it is not necessary to commit it to

God's will, whether He will hear us or not. We should know that He will give us these things willingly and most certainly; for we have His Word which declares to us His will in this respect. "God so loved the world," Christ tells us, "that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Behold, here we have God's will with reference to our salvation. Boldly, therefore, let us pray in accordance with this will, just as Christ, John 17., prays: "Father, I will that they be where I am!" Be this also our prayer: Father, I pray and I will have it so, that Thou forgive my sins for the sake of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, who has expiated their guilt, having made an atonement for them by His death!

In this way, however, we cannot perceive God's will in regard to bodily temptation and distress. We do not know whether it would contribute to our salvation and to the honor of God, if He should, according to our desire, quickly release us from sickness, poverty or other troubles. We should, therefore, pray for help indeed; but submit it to the will of God whether we shall be helped soon or shall continue in our affliction. And should God not relieve us immediately, and in the manner we wish, our prayer shall still not be useless, but God shall strengthen our hearts and impart to us grace and patience, so that we can bear our affliction and triumph in the end. The example here of Christ proves this; God, His Father, would not let the cup pass from Him; still He sent Him an angel who strengthened Him. So it shall be with us too, even if God should delay or refuse His help. But in regard to spiritual wants we are certain of being heard: God will, for Christ's sake, cheerfully forgive our sins and save our souls; therefore, we can pray for this with sure confidence, and it were a sin to doubt it.

This is the third lesson, about prayer in temptation. But we are very slow at learning it, as the example before us of the disciples plainly shows. Temptation was in store for them too, and, therefore, the Lord admonishes them to pray, so that they might not enter into temptation. For in such a case prayer is the only and the best preventive and remedy. But the flesh is so weak and sluggish, that when the danger is greatest and prayers are most needed we slumber and sleep; that is, anguish overtakes us and molests us so severely, that we think all opposition is vain and useless. Temptation or the fall is the result of this, as it was in the case of the disciples. But our gracious and compassionate God, who has promised us assistance and

mercy through His Son Jesus Christ, pardons this weakness and rescues us from temptation, if we heed His admonition, again to seek consolation and help with Him.

This, then, is the history of the agony at the mount of Olives, which should be diligently considered and properly applied. This is done when we, in the first place, learn from it how very heavy a burden sin must be, since it so oppressed and tortured the Son of God that He trembled, and that great drops of blood fell from Him to the ground, and when we, therefore, look well to ourselves and flee from sin.

This is done when we, secondly, draw consolation from this history in those times of distress and temptation which cannot fail to come upon us too; we see how the Son of God bore our sins.

We make the right use of this history when we, in the third place, continue instant in prayer, in every temptation, according to Christ's command: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

He who thus employs the occurrences at the mount of Olives, shall remain in the fear of God and in true faith, and shall find comfort and deliverance in all manner of dangers and temptations. May our blessed Lord Jesus grant this to us all through His Holy Spirit. Amen.

Second Passion Sermon. The Seizure Of Christ In The Garden. Matt. 26:47-50. (Translated by Isensee)

And while He yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed Him gave them a sign, saving, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He; hold Him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master; and kissed Him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took Him.

This is the second part of the history of the events which took place in the garden. Here we are told, in the first place, how Judas, one of the twelve, after he had conferred with the Jews on the subject, and sold the Lord Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, (each of which, according to our coin, is worth about half of a florin), finally also betrayed Him in the garden.

This was a very wicked and scandalous deed, and it is, even at this day, so offensive to many wise and sensible people that, on account of it, they speak evil of the Gospel, and consider its doctrine injurious. For, since Satan keeps no holiday, but chiefly sows his tares among the wheat where he sees the good seed coming forth hopefully, it is no wonder that among those who possess God's pure Word there are found so many disciples of Judas, that is, knaves and infidels.

When the world sees such deeds it quickly passes judgment upon them. Thus we are often compelled to hear how our adversaries of the present day lay all the blame for such offenses upon the doctrine, and say: If the

doctrine were correct it would also produce good fruit, but since there are so many more offenses in the world now than there were formerly, it must follow that the doctrine is false.

True, the Insurrection of the Peasants, in the year 1525, occurred after the Gospel had been brought to light. Then followed the Sacramentarians, Anabaptists, and other sects, the like of which no one heard nor saw before the Gospel came to us. But does it, therefore, follow that the doctrine is bad, and that such offenses were produced by the doctrine? We shall find the answer to this if we examine that villain, Judas, who was neither Gentile nor Turk; neither was he a Jew of that kind which offered resistance to Christ and paid no attention to the Word of God. Matthew Says that he was “one of the twelve,” whom Christ had called to preach, to baptize in His name, to cast out devils, and to perform all manner of glorious miracles. And since the Lord knew his knavery from the beginning, there is no doubt that He instructed Judas more than the rest, always admonishing him not to give place to sin and temptation. In connection with the Holy Supper the Evangelists specially mention that the Lord would every now and then let fly a word or two at him, if, peradventure, he might be turned from his sin. And, finally, He gave him a sop, no doubt casting upon him a longing look, as though He would say: O, thou poor fellow, how canst thou be my enemy? What cause do I give thee for intending such things against me?

But since nothing could prevail with him, and since he gave place to temptation and even yielded to it, the Lord said unto him: “That thou doest, do quickly;” as if He wanted to say: I see well enough that all warnings and admonitions are in vain; go, then; there is no help for thee.

Now what shall we say to this, that the desperate villain commits such a hideous sin, and harbors such malice and bitterness against his Lord and Master, in whose name he also had performed miracles, that, for the sake of a trifling sum of money, he betrays and sells the innocent, pious, gracious and gentle Lord and Saviour, well knowing that it would cost His life? Whom shall we blame for this? Here we read that he was one of the twelve. Shall we, therefore, say that the Lord Jesus and the doctrine which Judas heard of Christ are to blame? If Christ had taught him better things, would he have done them? But supposing that this thought did occur to you, would you not shudder at it, and fear so to accuse the Lord Jesus? For you know that He is holy and righteous, and the enemy of every vice; yea, that the

object of all His teaching and preaching was to check and ward off sin and save from death. Why, then, would you impute such crime to our dear Lord? You should rather say: If Judas had not been such a scandalous, wicked villain that every friendly warning was thrown away upon him, and could not free him from his malice, he would have behaved himself differently; for, although the other Apostles were so very weak that they were offended because of the Lord Jesus, they still do not fall into sin so monstrous as that of Judas, who must, therefore, have been such an arrant knave that nothing could save him.

Why then do you not pass the same judgment upon similar cases which occur at present? Why do you blame and blaspheme the Holy Gospel for that which wicked men and Satan have committed? For if Christ Himself cannot preach with such earnestness and power that Judas ceases to be a scoundrel, as he was from the beginning, it is no wonder that the like is seen among us also, and that not all obey the Word.

The Peasants' War, as stated before, followed after God had restored the Gospel to us; we have no desire to deny this. But must the Gospel, therefore, be reproached for this offense and mischief? Were there not insurrections and offenses in the world before the Gospel was preached? We should rather argue as follows: Satan hates the Gospel; men are by nature corrupt and inclined to evil; therefore, Satan and the evil world have caused these offenses, so that the good seed, which is the pure, wholesome doctrine, might be despised by men.

Thus originated the Sacramentarians and Anabaptists also, of whom no one heard before the coming of the Gospel. But the Gospel is not to blame. The devil, and then the temerity of idle and frivolous hearts which do not hold fast the Word, but follow their own wisdom, whistled for this jig, and prepared this terrible evil and such pernicious scandal.

Even at this day, as we see, this scandal prevails, that avarice and usury, lasciviousness and gluttony, and other vices are more common among those who boast of the Gospel than they were formerly under the papacy. Whence comes this filth? Is it learned from the Gospel? Are the preachers to blame? No, such thoughts be far from us! That would be abusing and calumniating God and His dear Word, and the Gospel ministry which is God's most precious gift. But we must blame the very devil, who is chagrined when he

sees the field well prepared and sowed with good seed; for this admirably impairs his kingdom. Therefore, while the householder sleeps, he comes with his peed of wickedness, and scatters tares over the whole field.

But thus he does not bring it about that the tares alone grow. For even as Judas, one of the twelve, was a rascal while the other disciples, notwithstanding their frailty, did not fall into such shocking sin; so, while many and very common offenses exist, we also find many noble, pious Christians, who abide in the Word in all sincerity, live in the fear of God and guard against offenses. We should be satisfied with this and thank God for it. And since we cannot get rid of this Judas, we shall have to tolerate him, still remembering that not all are like him, but that some of the disciples turned out better.

The instance of the spoiled child, Judas, teaches us, first, that we must not revile the Gospel like the Papists, but recognize the true cause of offenses in the devil and in those disobedient hearts which believe not the Word and will not be bettered by the Word.

Secondly, it teaches us, by that dreadful fall, to fear God. For, as was said above, Judas was no common person, but an Apostle, and, doubtless, possessed many noble, excellent gifts; this is indicated by his having a special office among the disciples, the Lord having appointed him householder, or steward.

Now this Judas, who was an Apostle, who in Jesus' name preached repentance and remission of sins, who baptized, cast out devils, and did other miracles, apostatized most shamefully from God and became the enemy of Christ, whom, for a little silver, he sold, betrayed and delivered over to be slaughtered. And since such a terrible misfortune befell so great a man as Judas, we surely have reason never to feel secure, but to fear God, to beware of sin, and, without ceasing, to pray that God would not lead us into temptation, but that when temptation comes upon us He would mercifully sustain us, deliver us from it, and not suffer us to stick fast in it. For unless the greatest caution is exercised and the weapon of prayer is diligently used, it is a very easy matter to fall and commit sin.

The case of Judas stands thus. He was an avaricious fellow; the Evangelists mention several times that he was in the habit of stealing from the treasury, which, according to the Lord's appointment, was in his care.

He gave the reins to this sin and became addicted to it. He permitted men to talk and to preach to him, as, alas! some of the miserable, provoking Christians of our day let themselves be talked and preached to; but went nevertheless and stole wherever he could, and thought himself in no danger because he was an Apostle as well as the rest.

Because he thus gave place to sin, his carnal security finally brought him so far that the devil entered into him quite, and urged him on to the attainment of his outrageous purpose of betraying his dear Lord and Master for fifteen florins. Since the devil was thus successful in leading Judas to this act of treachery, the greater wretchedness followed that Judas fell into despair and hanged himself on account of such sin. This is the end the devil had in view.

Now we should diligently observe this case of Judas and, as already stated, be admonished by it to keep a clear conscience; to live in the true fear of God; and not to cease praying that God would uphold us by His Word, rule us by His Holy Spirit, and keep us from sin. For if we make a mistake in an apparently trifling matter even, unspeakably great misery may ensue. Our dear Lord Jesus, in the 11. chapter of Luke, warns us against this, saying: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." We have instances of this before us. Before the blessed Gospel came to light again, the devil enjoyed perfect tranquility; he had ensnared nearly every heart by a spurious worship and by reliance on good works. But God has now banished him by the Gospel, that we might know that God is not served and that we are not benefited by the celebration of masses, by vigils, pilgrimages and monkery. God's Word has taught us a different form of worship, which the 2. Ps. calls "kissing the Son;" and God from heaven declared it "hearing and believing in His Son." This we know.

Let us see what takes place now. The devil would gladly come back to his old home; but he can not, for he finds the entrance blocked up and himself exposed by the light of God's Word. "Then goeth he and taketh to him seven," that is, innumerable, "other spirits more wicked than himself;

and they enter in and dwell there.” We see that most men are under the impression that they can lead a lewd life, practice covetousness and usury, lie and deceive, and still be in no danger, and be good Christians all the while. Wherever there is a hole left open for the devil, even if we would think it too small for him to peep through, it is large enough for him to stick his head in and drag his whole body after. In this way he entered into Judas too. We might think his stealing ten or twenty dollars a very little matter; but because he continually hankered after the pleasures of this sin, and did not suffer God’s Word to restrain him, the devil finally prevails on him, for the sake of money, to lead his blessed Lord and Master like an ox to the slaughter.

Hence the warning: Fear God and shun sin. But if you will continue in sin, you may look out for the danger, to which you thus expose yourself; for the devil does not go to work with the intention of conferring favors on you. He prompted Judas to avarice until he led him through despair to the gallows. Let this be your warning, and desist in time! Earnestly beseech God that He would, for Christ’s sake, not impute to you your iniquity, and then reform! This is the will of God. He permitted this dreadful example of Judas to be given that we might study it and recoil from it. For who would have thought that such a terrible sin could have such an insignificant beginning! O, do not make light of this; do not think in your heart: I can do so and so, and still be a Christian, – I will make amends some day, etc. The devil is too cunning for you; when he has once spun his web about you, it will not be easy for you to tear yourself away.

So much for the example of Judas. From another point of view our text furnishes us comfort and admonition. It is always the case, that, as our Lord Jesus fared on earth, so must His Church and precious Gospel fare to the end of the world. Judas, one of His disciples, betrays Christ. Thus, they who hold churchly offices and bear ecclesiastical titles and names, wish to be regarded as the heads and rulers of the Church; it is not thirty pieces of silver, as in the case of Judas, but many thousand dollars that make them traitors and archenemies of the Church. See the Pope, for instance; he has the very bag of Judas hanging from his neck, and is so fond of money and possessions that he takes them in exchange for the Gospel, which he betrays and sells, and with which he deals as the Jews dealt with the Lord Jesus before Caiaphas and Pilate! And just as Judas attaches to himself the

servants of the high priests and rulers, so the Pope gathers about him monks, priests, schools, bishops, and his entire brood of spiritless Sodomites, who help him capture Christ, that is, persecute and denounce the Gospel, as if it were the most hellish heresy. And finally Pilate, the civil government, also joins them, and attempts to exterminate the Gospel with the sword.

This has been taking place a long time, ever since the Pope received such great power and authority. And even today the ranks of Judas' array are being swelled by those who use the Gospel for coining gold, with which they then feed their avarice, ambition, pride and lust. These should, indeed, consider Judas' end. For it has been resolved that neither the Pope nor any other traitors of Christ and His Word, let them be ever so exalted and wise, shall be blessed in the possession of that price of blood obtained by selling Christ or His Gospel. Sooner or later remorse shall come; and, should no amendment follow, these Gospel vendors, together with Judas their master, shall receive eternal death and damnation as their recompense, in the depths of hell. Let no one doubt this! Were it not for the denunciation of such a terrible doom, we should have reason for being indignant on account of these miserable fellows, Pope, cardinals, bishops, priests and monks, they fare so sumptuously every day. But, my friends, let us not envy these fattening hogs because God permits them for a little while to wallow in the filth of their obscene lusts; the thirty pieces of silver, for which they sell their Lord every day, will lie heavily enough upon their souls when Christ shall say to them: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Besides, their heart and conscience cannot be long satisfied. For, although they may for a time live in thoughtlessness, security and riot, when eventually that little black dog, Remorse by name, begins to bark, it will go badly enough with them; then, with eternal ruin yawning before them, they shall see and feel what Isaiah meant in his 48. chapter, when he said: "There is no peace unto the wicked." We have instances before us at the present time of the terrible end which came upon several of the most prominent adversaries of the Gospel.

This we say with reference to Judas, of whom the Evangelists tell us how he sold Christ, led the Jews into the garden and betrayed the Lord Jesus with a kiss, which, according to Matthew, was the sign he should give the Jews. This is also applicable to those false prophets who, because they

have the authority of office, mislead poor consciences with false and impure doctrine.

The Evangelist John mentions two remarkable miracles performed in the garden by our Lord Jesus. One of them is the following. When the Jews had come into the garden to the Lord Jesus, He asked them, "Whom seek ye?" And when they had answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth," His reply, "I am He," so frightened them that they all went backward and fell to the ground as if they had been struck by lightning. This was done by a special and divine power, which the Lord showed forth at that time, not alone to terrify the Jews, but also to strengthen His disciples. These, instead of venturing, as they did, to rescue Jesus by force, might have concluded from this display of power that if the Lord did not choose to give Himself up unto death, He was able to defend Himself and resist His enemies without calling upon others for assistance or protection. The Lord wanted no violence done, and severely remonstrates with Peter on this subject, as we shall see. This miracle, therefore, serves as a protection against that gulf of offenses, in which both the Jews and afterwards even the disciples came near drowning. Since the Lord suffered Himself to be seized, allowed the Jews to play on Him their wanton pranks, and finally permitted Himself to be so shamefully executed upon the cross, even the disciples were so offended that they forgot all those miracles which they had seen Him do and all those powerful sermons they had heard of Him, and thought that everything was over with Him now, – that their hopes had been all in vain. And, on the other hand, the unbelieving and malicious Jews felt certain that their object would be well accomplished as soon as they should have Him nailed to the cross.

How glorious, therefore, this miracle! The great multitude of Jews, armed with swords and staves, provided with authority from the rulers, and eager and desperate to do its work, is driven back and so frightened that they all fall to the ground as if some enemy had violently thrust them down; and all this by the single word, "I am He," spoken by a man who stood alone and weaponless, and who did nothing more than speak most friendly words. The disciples see this great miracle; the Jews also feel its force; still it is soon forgotten. Yea, because Christ so patiently submitted to His sufferings and used no other power against His enemies, they took Him to be a mere man.

But they should in all reason have argued as follows: If this Man is able, with a single word, which is neither invective nor curse, but only a gentle reply, as with a thunderbolt, to strike down such great, strong, bold and armed men, then must there surely be a deep meaning in His voluntary resignation. He is able to defend and protect Himself, but instead of doing so He submits. He therefore does not desire the aid of men. And, although He now hides His power and permits the Jews to do with Him what they will, this shall, by no means, be the end of it. Dismay must seize His enemies, but He must conquer. For that divine power which He showed forth so frequently, and which He manifests here in the garden especially by the single word, "I am He," cannot remain withheld and repressed for a great length of time, etc.

The disciples in particular should have regarded the miracle in this light. There can be no doubt that it was to this end that the Lord here revealed His divine might. But alas, the effects of this were too quickly lost upon both parties. The Jews, intent on their mischief, feared no further. The disciples, running hither and thither, now sad, now terrified, had no hope, of ever again seeing their Lord and Master, to say nothing of their despairing of ever being further benefited by Him. This was the "hour of darkness," as Christ calls it in the Gospel according to St. John, in which offenses prevailed and the devil exercised His power. It was for this reason that the Lord so earnestly admonished the disciples, "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

The other miracle is similar to this. It is performed by Christ's second answer: "I have told you that I am He; if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." Our dear Lord is alone, and has neither sword nor spear; whereas Judas, the traitor, comes upon Him with a great multitude. We would think that our dear Lord had reason to entreat and beg, seeing that He stands against such numbers. But He advances and commands the Jews that they should let His disciples alone, and not lay hands on one of them. This is a stern command: *Sinite hos abire*, "Let these go;" and we see that it was not given in vain. For they, no doubt, set out with the thought that they would capture the whole company, Master and disciples. But this command compels them to desist from their intention of taking the disciples, although Peter did not deserve this, because he lay about him with his sword.

But why does the Lord give such a command? It is not incorrect to say, that He wishes to show by this that He esteems His own life more lightly than the lives of His disciples; for He rescues them while He lets Himself be taken and bound. For the same reason He calls Himself a “Good Shepherd” who “giveth His life for the sheep;” and shows us His love as a special example, saying: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” We clearly see that He is silent about His own person; the Jews do with Him what they please and He does not hinder them. But He wants them to let His disciples alone and to do no violence to them. This shows that He cares more for them than for Himself.

This was not done without a purpose. Our dear Lord Jesus wanted no partners in the sufferings before Him. For, as the 53. chapter of Isaiah tells us, “The Lord hath laid on Him,” on Him alone, “the iniquity of us all,” and this He had to bear alone and for this offer Himself as a sacrifice. True, the disciples also were afterwards compelled to suffer for the sake of Christ and His Word, as Christ had told James and John: “Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of.”

But the suffering of the Lord Jesus was a suffering for my sins, for thy sins, and for the sins of all the world; so that now, for Christ’s sake, God will not only forgive and pass by these sins, but also bestow righteousness and eternal life upon me, upon thee, and upon all believers. For this reason Christ desired to be alone, and permitted no one to be seized nor to suffer with Him.

This should be preached in all churches throughout Christendom, and with all diligence should the people be continually taught to hope for the forgiveness of every sin, alone through the sufferings and death of Christ, etc. But this is not done by the abominable Pope and his scandalous scribblers and shriekers. Their tongues, indeed, confess that Jesus is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world; but their actions give their words the lie. This they prove by their so woefully deceiving the poor people with their falsehoods; telling them to invoke deceased saints, of these saints to seek pardon for their sins, and with the merits of these saints to console themselves, and in virtue of their doing this they receive indulgences. This is as much as saying that Christ desired associates in His sufferings, and accomplished nothing by Himself.

That the Lord was afterwards crucified between “two thieves” has its peculiar signification, viz., to show for whom Christ’s sufferings avail, and upon whom they are lost; of which, however, we have no time to speak at present. But here in the garden the word is: *Sinite hos abire*, “Let these go;” I alone am fit for this work; to suffer and to die for the sins of the world is an office which belongs to me alone. Neither John, Peter or James can do anything in this; let all these go their way! I, “I am He;” me you must lay hold on, me capture, me bind, me crucify, unto me it is given to take away the sin of the world; and all who believe in me, that is, comfort themselves with my suffering and death, shall find a gracious God and eternal life.

This, then, is the second part of the history of those things concerning Christ which occurred in the garden. It teaches us: first, to bear in mind this terrible fall of the Apostle Judas, to abide in the fear of God, to avoid sin, and to be diligent in prayer that God may in mercy prevent us from falling as Judas fell; secondly, that we also, as true Christians, shall be sorely molested by the avarice of some Judas or other, that we must patiently endure this and cling to the consolation that Christ, though He may be weak in us now, will show His power at the proper time, and graciously protect and preserve us. The Ever-living Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ grant us this by His Holy Spirit. Amen.

Third Passion Sermon. Christ Refusing To Be Rescued By Peter's Sword. Matt. 26:51-56. (Translated by Isensee).

And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done, that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook Him, and fled.

This is the third and last part of the scene in the garden, or at the mount of Olives. It relates how Peter drew his sword, intending to rescue his Master by force, after they had taken the Lord Jesus.

The facts here narrated, in the first place, teach us a necessary and useful lesson concerning the sword, or temporal power, showing who shall and who shall not wield it, and what punishment is due to him who presumes to bear it without a call. Secondly, whereas Peter in this case makes use of the sword to liberate Christ, and still Christ forbids his doing so, it becomes necessary here to treat the question, whether we dare or should defend the Gospel with the sword, so that the civil government may be properly

instructed in both respects, and neither act contrary to its office, nor do more than its calling demands. Otherwise both Church and State would be unjustly dealt by, which injustice would be most certainly punished.

Now as far as Peter is concerned, it is manifest that he was a minister or ecclesiastic, whom it does not behoove to bear the sword, according to the words of Christ: "The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion. But it shall not be so among you." Therefore, Peter does wrong in resorting to the sword for the Lord's protection, and Christ rebukes him for it. This was not a matter that could be decided with the sword, for Christ says: Even if our cause did depend upon our defense, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" This was as much as saying: It is now expedient for me to suffer; I will not have any one to draw his sword on my account and strike for my protection. But Christ administers this rebuke to Peter for the reason, also, that to him as a private person the sword did not belong. Therefore, He not only commands Peter to put up his sword, but also pronounces the terrible threat: "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

We must duly heed these words; for by them the Lord makes a distinction among men, informing us that some wield the sword by divine commission. These are all they who, by the proper and ordinary means, are called to the temporal government for the purpose of ruling, of guarding and promoting the public weal, and of preventing public offenses. Into the hands of these God gives the sword, that is, it is God's will and institution that they bear the sword, not for their own emolument, but for the good of their subjects, as St. Paul gays: A ruler "is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." For since words will not persuade the world, severity must be used, and people must be compelled to desist from crime, so that the common peace and unity may be maintained and a restraint be put upon wantonness. If the thief persist in stealing, let him dangle from the gallows, and then we shall be secure from him. Let the wanton villain who takes delight in injuring every one, and who strikes and stabs for the sake of a mere word, find justice on the gibbet, and then he will let people alone; he will henceforth strike and stab no more, for the hangman puts an excellent stop to such work. Therefore, the civil government serves God by using the sword against sin and scandal; for God, who will not leave offenses and sin unpunished, has given the

command to do this. God makes this distinction among men, that to a few He entrusts the sword, with it to ward off mischief and to protect the subjects.

But the rest, who have not received such authority, must, by no means, handle the sword, and never draw it except at the command of the temporal government. But should they take it on their own responsibility, the judgment written here will most certainly not fail: "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." In every history we see how they who took revenge into their own hands never succeeded well with it; all rebels had to suffer finally and perished with the sword. All manslayers who wickedly murdered others were either delivered to the executioner or perished in some other way, or else went so astray in the miserable life they led that they would a thousand times better have died. Such is the regulation of God; He will have it so, that all they that take the sword, and do not wait until God or the government gives it to them, shall perish with the sword; this cannot be changed. Let every one, therefore, be careful and bridle his wrath; let him either patiently bear his wrongs and subdue his passion, or else seek justice in the proper and divinely sanctioned way. What this is, has been sufficiently pointed out. Since God has given temporal governments the command to restrain offenses and defend the pious with the sword, we must seek safety at the hands of these governments and inform against the offender. We must do this not alone for our security, but also to the end that offenses be resisted, that malice be hindered, and that they who exercise temporal authority may properly discharge the duties of their office. For neither a mayor of a town nor a ruler of a land can be acquainted with every disturbance, and still their office makes them responsible to God for the quelling of all offenses and uproars. Now if you and every body else would choose to keep silent about your wrongs, this would only increase the mischief and be giving the occasion for your own hurt, both of which results would be wrong, and both of which you can prevent by calling upon the government for protection. Should the government, however, upon your petition do nothing in this matter, and not help you to your rights, then observe this: Bear your wrongs patiently and beware of revenging yourself, lest your righteous cause become unrighteous before God and man.

But what then becomes of the words of Christ: "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue

thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also," etc.? We answer: Both of these commands were given that we might be restrained from taking revenge into our own hands, and that we might rather suffer all things, and wait for the judgment of the Heavenly Judge, who is not so slow and heedless in conducting His office, as the civil authorities frequently are in conducting theirs. Christ here does not forbid our complaining to the government of the injury that is done us; He does not impose silence upon us.

But, you ask, do I not seek revenge when I make complaint against him who has harmed me? Most certainly; but you do right by this, provided you do it in the proper way and without anger or hatred towards your neighbor. For this is not your own revenge, but the revenge instituted by God for the purpose of checking scandal and protecting every one in the possession of his own. In short, he who has not been commanded to use the sword and still arrogates it to himself, to revenge himself or others, subjects himself to the judgment and condemnation of God: "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Whenever, therefore, you or yours are injured, beware of the improper course of grasping the sword yourself and being your own defender! But make use of the correct means, that is, bring the matter before your government and let this protect and succor you; God commanded it to do this and ordained it for this. If you do this you do well, and will*be safe against meddling with the affairs of others. But if the government either will not or can not help you, then endure your afflictions, touch not the sword, and let God fee your Avenger; He surely will avenge you and also punish the government for its negligence!

But should a cutthroat come upon me in the forest, or a ruffian attack me on the highway, with the intention to harm me, and I had no time to seek the protection of the government, must I suffer myself to be injured or murdered? No; for in such a case the government permits every one to defend his person and his life against violence and outrage; for whenever she can lay hold on these villains, she executes them without delay. For this and other reasons Moses, according to the command of God, prescribed the appointment of several cities of refuge, to which the manslayer might resort who had taken life not intentionally, nor for revenge, nor in wrath, but accidentally or in pressing necessity. The civil authorities also follow this

rule and recognize the lawfulness of self-defense. But in all other cases remember that “All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”

But as they who, having no right to the sword, still continue to usurp the power of the sword, do not seek lawful vengeance and wish to administer vengeance themselves; even so, on the other hand, they, to whom God has given the sword that they might diligently wield it, are always inclined to be too mild, as though God had given a fox’s tail into their hand instead of a keen-edged sword. These latter also commit great sin and are grievously disobedient before God, and they also shall be very sorely punished for their conduct. For where the civil government does not oppose public scandal with reasonable severity, there God Himself must eventually interfere as Judge and use the sword. And at the advent of this Judge, not only an individual or two, but an entire city or land must suffer for these sins. This we learn from many passages of Scripture and from numerous instances before us. It is, therefore, necessary that magistrates do not become lazy or indulgent, but that they exercise a becoming earnestness and a vigilant supervision, and that they apply punishment wherever offenses exist; thus they satisfy the demands of their office and please God. But as we have already said, this is an unpleasant duty; men take no delight in it, as can be shown by examples. For how often do we not find mildness used where it should not be used, and the most heinous offenses lightly punished! How frequently are not hindrances interposed, and intercession made, so that crimes escape unpunished!

But should we not have more regard for the divine command than for human intercession? God says: Receive from my hand this sword; I give it thee that thou shalt, in my stead, punish every one under thy control who is guilty of public offense, no matter whether he be friend or foe, exalted or low, rich or poor, noble or ignoble; let the sword descend wherever there are offenses, so that these may not prevail! This is what God says to every government. But, on the other hand, men come with their petitions, asking that this or that one might be pardoned, or punished mildly, although the most terrible trespasses, *atrocia delicta*, have been committed, such as brutal murder, incest, and the like, etc. And it often happens that man’s intercession has more influence upon the government than the stringent command of God. I leave it to you to judge whether this is right, and what must be the result under God’s justice.

Sometimes offenses are public, but the civil government refuses to punish them unless some one volunteers as plaintiff. Because no one brings complaint, it lets the matter pass. This is downright heedlessness, both in regard to God's command and to the office. The watchman is stationed on the tower, by day and by night to be on the lookout for fires or other mischief that may occur within or without the city, and then to publish the danger in time, and to warn against losses. In like manner God has placed the temporal ruler far above all other people, that he might exercise watchfulness, and when he sees offenses about to be committed, be they great or small, to put them down with the sword before they become formidable, no matter whether any one has complained or not. Therefore, "he beareth the sword," as Paul says, to be "a terror to evil works," so that peace may be enjoyed by all and wantonness may be resisted. And the Lord commands here that the sword shall not rest nor be idle, but destroy those who take it. Thus we see that both parties fail to do their duty: they who have not the sword, wish to have it and lay about them with it, like Peter here; but they who have it, can with great difficulty be persuaded to grasp and wield it.

But they who really understand and obey this passage will act differently. They, into whose hands God has not committed the sword, will, of course, let it alone, and rather suffer all things than presume so far as to take it; and this, because they recognize the command of Christ and the ordinance of God, which they feel certain dare not be trifled with, and against the violation of which they guard as against the executioner, the gallows or the wheel. And they, to whom God has given the sword, will cheerfully and fearlessly sway it over one and all, regardless of their subjects' station and property; for they know that they are bound to check scandal wherever they meet it, and, therefore, they obey God and serve Him eagerly. This must suffice for the first point.

The question which we stated in the beginning now claims attention. As private persons are absolutely forbidden to grasp the sword, and the Lord reproves Peter for drawing his sword in Christ's behalf, would it then be lawful for a government to defend itself when attacked on account of religion? Or, in plainer terms: considering that Christ did not permit Peter to rescue Him with the sword, are rulers permitted to resist attacks made on

the Gospel, and to instruct their subjects everywhere to defend it with the sword?

It is necessary here, first, to observe the distinction between the civil government, the office of the ministry, and the private person. The civil government, above all other duties assigned to it, has received the emphatic command to disseminate and apply God's Word, and with the sword to protect those subjects who are oppressed on account of the Word. About this there is no question whatever; for the sword must protect virtue and punish vice, and, above all, serve to promote the knowledge of God, as we infer from Rom. 13. And God says in Isa.: The Church shall "suck the breasts of kings," that is, they shall be her protectors; and, in the 24. Ps.: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in."

But ministers of the Gospel and private persons are not the civil government; therefore, neither ministers nor private persons dare draw the sword, for they have received no command to this effect. Peter, at that time, did not understand this so; for he did not know that the ministry would be an office void of royal and princely favor. Peter should not, therefore, have drawn the sword. But all temporal authorities are obliged to shield God's Word and the true Church. Had God ordained them as swineherds, then their only duty would be to protect the throats and care for the corn of their subjects; but, as it now is, they must, first of all, preserve the honor and knowledge of God in the human race, perpetuate the true worship of God, punish and exterminate false doctrine and idolatry, and rather hazard everything than suffer themselves or their subjects to be forced into idolatry or falsehood. Therefore the 2. Ps. says to them: "Kiss the Son," that is, receive and protect God's Word!

This is the civil ruler's noblest duty. We see in history that God imposed this duty, and that the Holy Spirit highly extols not only the pious Jewish kings, Jehoshaphat, Josiah, Hezekiah, but also the kings of the Gentiles, e. g. Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, Cyrus, because they instituted the true worship of God and violently opposed the worship of idols.

This being the office of the civil government, it follows that she must, as long as she can, protect and preserve herself and those belonging to her against the attacks of the ungodly and never give way to these assaults; for

it is impossible that they who persecute God's Word and carry on idolatry, should have the Holy Ghost. For what would be the result should she refuse to do this? She alone bears the sword; and her subjects dare not take it even in case she herself refuses to use it. The inevitable result must be that success would crown the efforts of the wicked, the Word of God would be extirpated, God's pure worship would cease, and the old idolatry would be re-established!

Now who is willing to sanction this and, by sanctioning it, to heap upon himself such great and terrible sin? yes, who will dare to do this, knowing that it is written: "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way;" further, Lev. 24: "He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death;" also: "Flee from idolatry;" and again: "Rulers are a terror to evil works?" And now, since the establishing of idolatry is an evil work, they who have the sword are not only permitted, but also seriously commanded, with all boldness to shield and save themselves and theirs from this evil by the sword. On the subject of self-defense, you may find the answer to the question, whether subordinates may defend themselves against those superiors who exercise public tyranny, as against notorious murderers or highwaymen, by reading the Admonition to the German People, and other works which specially treat on this subject; it would occupy too much time at present.

But here we speak of those alone who have the sword, that is, who are in office. Now if bishops for instance, who are of that class of people that has not the sword, deprive their subjects of one of the elements in the Holy Supper, or inflict upon them other manifest errors, these subjects, although they ought, in such cases, to obey God rather than men, and although God seriously requires such disobedience to their commands, dare not draw the sword on account of such errors, but must bear them, if they would not use the sword like Peter, who had not been commanded to do so.

But you say that a Christian must tolerate injustice and violence, and not oppose them by force, I answer that the subject of which we now are speaking is the civil government, who is the sword-bearer; and she has sufficient violence done her when other governments destroy her peace and attack her in war. Let us regard these her sufferings as severe enough, and not impose still further burdens upon a Christian government! He who afflicts her still more, and even snatches the sword out of her hand, virtually

gives his consent that the enemies of truth shall exercise their malice without restraint, and even deprive us of God's Word. There is time enough for giving such consent, when the government is not able to protect the truth. But as long as we can hope for her help, and as long as the matter depends upon the help of God and reposes in His hand, it is our duty to venture and to suffer, so that we may not be accused of being more mindful of favor, peace, and the like, than of God's "Word and the salvation and well-being of the subjects.

Ever clear and plain, therefore, stands the command: *Osculamini filium; Hunc audite*, "Kiss the Son;" "Hear ye Him;" "Flee from idolatry," etc. Such commands as these require of the worldly ruler that he oppose not merely worldly or temporal offence, but also false doctrine and false worship. But by what means must he do this? What means has God given him? Read St. Paul's 13. chapter to the Romans, where you are informed: "He beareth not the sword in vain," But against whom shall he bear it? Against those who defend false doctrines and idolatry, and who seek to compel others to accept heresy and false worship. This the Christian government dare not tolerate. For the heavenly Lord of lords has forbidden it, and declares that God is worshiped and His Word lauded when we jeopard peace, the favor of men, and the like, rather than sanction that which militates against God's Word.

This, then, is the import of Peter's unauthorized attempt at liberating the Lord by fighting with the sword. But in our text we find yet another sermon, which is a reproof designed especially for the Jews, who had been instructed by their proper government to take swords and staves, and with them to attack the Lord Jesus. Still they receive the Lord's reprimand. "Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me."

With these words the Lord rebukes them for a twofold reason. In the first place, even when the civil government puts the sword into her subjects' hands, they must not take it if they are expected to use it in an unrighteous cause; and, secondly, they should not have taken it to use it against Him, their Lord. For He was no murderer. It was the doctrine that was in question. Doctrinal disputes are not to be judged and decided by fire and sword in imitation of the Papists, but according to the Scriptures. If we are

heretics, as they accuse us, then let them prove it from Scripture, and leave the hangman at home; he has no business with such disputes.

But as the Jews dealt with Christ, so the Papists, their disciples, still deal with Him. They can not and they will not enter upon a debate, unless their doctors and papal decrees are recognized as having equal authority with God's Word. But since we refuse to recognize them as having such, they come out against us with swords and staves, as did the Jews against Christ. I suppose they do this so that every one can see that they are of the same breed with the Jews, to whom the Lord says, John 8: "Ye are of your father the devil," for "ye seek to kill me." This applies admirably to these bloodhounds, the Papists. But we, who, like Peter, have not been called to use the sword, must suffer these things. God, however, in His own good time, will punish such cruel despotism, and mercifully deliver His own from the fury of these blood-thirsty tyrants. Amen.

Fourth Passion Sermon. The Lord Jesus Led To Annas And Caiaphas And Tried By The Jews. Matt. 26:57-68. (Translated by Isensee)

And they that had laid hold on Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed Him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end. Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council sought false witness against Jesus, to put Him to death; but found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. And the high priest arose, and said unto Him, Answerest Thou nothing? what is it which these witness against Thee? But Jesus held His peace And the high priest answered and said unto Him, I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. Then did they spit in His face, and buffeted Him; and others smote Him with the palms of their

hands, saying, Prophecy unto us, Thou Christ, Who is he that smote Thee?

We have heard how our Lord Jesus was betrayed by Judas in the garden and taken by the Jews. Now we come to notice how He was brought before Caiaphas, the high priest, under such charges as to lead to the unanimous decision that there was sufficient cause for delivering Him to Pilate and aiming at His life.

In describing these things so carefully it was not the only object of the Evangelists to teach us the holy innocence of our Lord Jesus. That He was wholly pure and altogether without sin we must conclude from the known fact that He was the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary. But, since the Church and the Gospel must receive the same treatment in the world which the Lord Jesus received, the history of Christ's wrongs is given us especially to the end that we may not be offended when similar wrongs are inflicted upon us also, but that we may always refer to it for consolation and learn to be patient. For if God's Son, our Master and our Head, was falsely accused, delivered to Pilate by the high priests, scribes and elders, and surrendered to the Gentiles to be crucified, is it to be wondered at if we receive similar treatment? The servant is not to be more successful than his master. Therefore, we should rejoice when our experience is such that we can truthfully boast: This was the experience of my Lord Jesus also. For if we are like Him in suffering, we are warranted in the hope of being like Him in glory too; yea, and even before the revelation of this glory, we shall, in our suffering, derive from Him comfort, aid, deliverance. This history, which shows that even our Lord Jesus was not exempt from suffering, serves, therefore, first, to minister unto us consolation, that we may become more cheerful and more patient in our sufferings.

And, secondly, it offers us an antidote against the common offenses of this world. For every one regards the titular dignitaries, called chief priests and elders of the people here, as pious men and saints, in virtue of their office, station and pomp. And so today the Pope, bishops, monks and priests desire, on account of their office, to be looked upon and treated as the most eminent members of the Christian Church. But let us learn here not to judge men by the office they hold, else we shall be deceived; but by the manner in

which they act towards Christ – by the relation which their heart, their will, sustains towards Him. When, by this text, we find good or evil in them, we must judge them accordingly; for then our judgment shall always be just. The office is, without a doubt, a holy and a good one; but he who holds it may be a villain. For here we see that the high priests, the scribes and the elders, who are the rulers and leaders of the people in spiritual things and in things temporal, are the very ones who cannot tolerate the Lord Jesus and who, by dint of unremitting persecution and manifold intrigues, finally bring Him to the cross. We must confess that they are God's worst enemies and also, as Luke testifies in the 5. chapter of Acts, Epicureans, who in those days said that there is no resurrection from the dead, neither angel nor spirit. If we would, therefore, know to a certainty whether Pope, bishops, and the like, are pious or not, we must not be misled by their office; but need merely see how they conduct themselves towards the Gospel and the true doctrine, when we shall find that all of them are disciples of Judas, and that their hearts are disposed towards the Gospel as were those of the high priests towards Christ. These are the very fruits by which we may know the false prophets, the wolves, even when they come in sheep's clothing and have the appearance of devout and harmless persons.

We shall now take up the trial of our Lord, and see with what hatred, malignity, craft, and virulence they treat Christ.

The Evangelist John mentions that the Jews led the Lord Jesus first to Annas, who, according to Acts 4., was also a high priest, but not in that year, and who was the father-in-law to Caiaphas, who officiated at the time. But Annas soon gave Him over to his son-in-law, Caiaphas, who was the high priest that same year; for with him the chief priests and elders were already assembled.

Here we see, in the first place, how inequitably the high priests deal with the Lord Jesus; for they are at the same time both plaintiff and judge. The Lord could, therefore, not receive justice, let His cause have been ever so good, and let Him have said and done what He would. Such a way of proceeding would be very dishonorable in a worldly law-suit, in which the same person is forbidden to act as plaintiff and judge by a special law. But nothing is sinful for these holy ones; they have all power; they can do as they please, and think they have the right to do so! Woe to him who

construes their actions ill, tells them they are in the wrong, or admonishes them!

Just so our spiritless tyrants, Pope, cardinals and bishops conduct themselves. The Pope has for many successive years been causing us Germans to gape in expectation of a Council, at which, as he has been pretending, he would abolish the dissension existing in religious matters. And, on our part, many serious efforts have been made at many an imperial diet, and on other occasions, to secure a free, Christian Council, at which to end the present disunion by means of the Holy Scriptures. But it is the manifest desire of the Pope to treat us and the Gospel as the Jews here treated Christ. He is a party in the case; accusation is brought against the blasphemous dogmas and counterfeit cultus which he has insinuated into the Church, in spite of God's Word, and upon which he still insists; what should he, as the defendant, do? If he himself is to be the judge, he will not declare himself in the wrong and decide in favor of his opponent, the plaintiff. But upon such a course as this the Pope and his parasites – these honorable men! – strenuously insist. Yea and more, when a Council is held he takes public part in it, while we, previously condemned by him, obtain neither vote nor seat. This is a wanton, unjust and grievous procedure.

But here we have the proof that the world does not desire and is not able to deal otherwise with Christ. We should, therefore, be resigned, and, with the Lord Jesus, bear such injustice until the appointed time; for what else can we do? Caiaphas, who, as judge, sat in the judgment seat, himself accuses the Lord Jesus and then even decides against Him. This is the first act of injustice in the trial before the priests.

Another atrocious feature of this trial we find in their absolutely demanding the death of the Lord Jesus, while they cannot find sufficient cause for this, but must call to their assistance falsehood and false witnesses, until finally Caiaphas, the judge, himself arises and brings forth an accusation possessing some semblance of foundation. Among other false testimony submitted, was that of “two false witnesses,” who came “and said: This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.”

The correct history of this latter charge we find in the 2. chapter of John. When our Lord Jesus, in Jerusalem, at the first passover after His baptism,

had with a scourge driven out of the temple the changers of money and the merchants, together with their oxen, sheep, doves, and whatever else they had, and poured out the changers' money, and overthrown the tables, the Jews gathered together and said: Thou ventur'est to exercise special violence here; hast Thou authority to do this? What sign shewest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things? Then the Lord answered them thus: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." By this He meant to say the same as by the sign of the Prophet Jonah, Matt. 12., namely this: You desire a sign and shall have it. You shall kill me; but on the third day I will raise myself from the dead. He for whom such sign does not suffice is past all help. This is the narrative.

But see, how wantonly they pervert His words! He says: "Destroy this temple;" and then they charge Him with having said: "I am able to destroy the temple," thus to make Him appear guilty of having spoken against the temple of God. And even if we accept the Jews' interpretation of Christ's words, admitting that they were spoken with reference to the temple at Jerusalem, would a man be guilty of death on account of using such words? In short, he who would make charges against Christ, must first become a base liar; our Papists also are a living proof of this. What they cry out against the Gospel is bare falsehood. They are dead to every sense of shame, daub their notions into other men's books and belie us, saying that the holy sacrament receives scandalous treatment at our hands, that we throw against the wall what remains of the cup, and that we tramp with our feet what is left of the consecrated bread. Are these not gross, palpable lies? Why, common, bread and wine is not treated so, but is preserved. How much more would we then not keep decently that, of which we confess and teach, in opposition to the Sacramentarians, that it is not mere bread and not mere wine, but the true body and blood of Christ, given for us upon the cross and shed for our sins! But we need not wonder at the Papists' lies. He who deals in falsehoods can speak no truth, and he who acts contrary to truth cannot help himself except with lies. On this principle the world, as we here see, dealt with Christ, and will continue so to deal with the Christians and the Holy Gospel; for it cannot do otherwise.

But when their witness agreed not together and was powerless in itself, Caiaphas, the judge or high priest, rushed to the rescue, and, according to John, asked Jesus of His disciples, and of His doctrine, as though he would

say: What is this new doctrine Thou bringest? Art Thou dissatisfied with Moses? Must Thou have something extra? Art Thou alone wise and are all we fools? Where are they now who regarded Thy doctrine right and divine? It may be such a good doctrine that we too would be pleased with it and receive it. But it is merely the rabble, which knows nothing about the law, that Thou attachest to thyself; the honest and upright desire not thy preaching. To such question the Lord answered: "I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them; behold, they know what I said." The Lord does not desire His doctrine to be despised, and says that He had not feared the light, but had preached it openly to the world, that it should, therefore, not be reviled as a thing done in a corner.

When He had thus spoken, a scoundrel standing by dealt the Lord a severe blow with the palm of his hand, as though it were intolerable that the high priest should be thus answered and not more reverently treated. Even today we see such priests' slaves, who are ready to defend with the sword the sacrilegious doctrines and shameful, sodomitical life of the Pope and his shaved and shorn train. And then we also find those vain prattlers, jesters, mountebanks, and the like, who would serve them faithfully, and whose only object in blaspheming and reviling the holy Gospel is, to receive the favor of their bishops and of the idol at Rome. This we must suffer, indeed, as Christ also suffered it, but dare not connive at it, nor forbear rebuking and publishing such vice. We must do as Christ here does: He addresses the servant, and tells him that he had smitten Him unjustly, but does nothing further.

When they now found themselves without any cause of action, Caiaphas, the high priest, comes to the main point, saying: "I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Knave Caiaphas thinks thus to hit the nail on the head, and to seize the Lord Jesus by the throat. Observe here, first of all, that it is not the intention of Caiaphas that he or the rest should believe in the Lord, in case He should say that He is the Christ. By no means! But this is the very confession they desire to hear Him make, thinking that then they could convict Him without difficulty. And Christ understands them well enough; but this does not induce Him to deny who He is. He answers: "Thou hast said," that is, just

as thou hast said, I am the Christ And what is still more, it shall only be a little while yet and ye shall “see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power;” that is, after these days I shall not need to suffer any more, but, in my glorified body, shall I show that I am not only a man, as you regard me, but also the almighty Son of God, who rules over all, and on the judgment day I shall come in the clouds of heaven and judge the quick and the dead.

Behold, now the high priest has heard the glorious, excellent confession which tells him what he should believe concerning this man, whom he and others had prepared themselves to entrap, and whom they were resolved on killing. Let us see what use the high priest makes of this confession. Matthew tells us that he “rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. What think ye?”

In this, the first trial of our blessed Lord Jesus, which took place in the house of Caiaphas, He was declared a heretic and blasphemer. This gluts the high priestly maw; and now it only remains to have some worldly accusation brought against Christ before Pilate, so that His death might be decreed. While each one privately deliberates on this, our innocent Lord Jesus is made to submit to their scorn; He must suffer them to spit in His holy face, and Himself to be buffeted, derided, smitten and mocked. For they regard such treatment altogether just, because Christ has been pronounced a heretic and blasphemer. They make a jest of His saying that He is the Christ. One strikes Him on this side, another on that. “Aha! You are the Christ, are you,” they say, “then, pray, prophesy unto us, who is he that smote Thee?”

But let us diligently mark whether the Gospel does not fare in the same way today. The Papists question us, and desire to know our doctrine. And then, when we with the greatest simplicity and honesty confess our doctrine, as was done at Augsburg, at Ratisbon, and at imperial diets in other places, the mighty clamor rises: Heretics, heretics! All are busy then at heaping upon the poor Christians whatever ignominy, contempt, mockery and injury they can rally. They cry: It is Evangelical you are, is it? Is this your Gospel? Just wait, we will give you a little of the Gospel? And so they have gone to work and inflicted a most atrocious reproduction of the Passion-History upon the pious Christians of Germany, Italy, France and England.

It is, therefore, important that we carefully study this priestly *Processum Juris*. For then, in case we are brought before a similar tribunal, we can follow the example of our Lord Jesus, learning of Him patience, and deriving from Him true consolation. And, should we be compelled to suffer with Him for the sake of His "Word, we can hope also to live with Him, and with Him to be lifted to glory. May God grant this to us all. Amen.

Fifth Passion Sermon. Peter Thrice Denies The Lord Jesus In The House Of Caiaphas. Matt. 29:69-75 (Translated by Isensee)

Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crew, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

This is a useful narrative, for which reason it is related by each of the four Evangelists. It is useful chiefly in two respects. First, it teaches us to cherish humility and avoid presumption; for see how easily Peter, who would previously have gladly imperiled his body and his life for the Lord Jesus, is brought to such a terrible fall. And secondly, it teaches us how we may regain grace, after we have fallen into sin; for Peter furnishes us with a pleasing example of Christian repentance, showing what repentance really is, and how we must be freed from sin. But let us first relate the history.

When Jesus was taken captive in the garden and led away, first to Annas, father-in-law to Caiaphas, and from Annas to the high priest Caiaphas, John, as he himself writes, followed from afar and entered the house of Caiaphas, in which he was acquainted, bringing Peter in with him. The latter sat down with the servants in the house and warmed himself at the fire. Then a damsel asked him whether he was a disciple of the captive Jesus. He vehemently denied that he was. The cock then crew for the first time. Upon this, as Matthew and Mark relate, Peter went away from the fire, out into the porch, where he was encountered in a similar way by a maid, who began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. Luke tells us that it was a man who said this of Peter. It needs merely be remembered here that, after the maid had begun to speak about Peter, the rest also expressed their opinions and chimed in with the maid. Peter then a second time denied. And finally, about the space of one hour after, as we are informed by Luke, he was met by one of the servants of the high priest, who, according to John, was a kinsman to him whose ear Peter cut off. He attacks Peter a little more severely than the rest, publicly saying that he had seen him in the garden with Jesus. Peter would not keep silent to this accusation, for he feared that it would endanger his life. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man, of whom ye speak. Now the Lord turns and casts upon Peter a look which so penetrates his soul, that he now perceives what he has done; and he goes out of Caiaphas' palace and weeps bitterly. This is about the whole of the occurrence in order, as related by the four Evangelists.

Here we should, in the first place, as stated in the beginning, learn from the example of pious Peter to recognize our weakness, so that we may refrain from putting absolute confidence in other people or in ourselves. For our hearts are so entirely faint and fickle that they change every hour, as the Lord says in the 2. chapter of John. Who in the world would have expected such instability and feebleness in Peter! When the Lord, Luke 22., cautioned him, saying, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat, how courageous was he not, how bold and undismayed! "Lord," said he, "I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death." And when the Lord continued to admonish him, telling him not to be so foolhardy, and that before the cock would crow twice he should have denied Him thrice, we see that Peter thought it all a fable. He imagined this impossible, and intended to adhere to and defend the Lord at the risk of his

own life. And his actions, indeed, show this to have been his intention. For in the hour of greatest peril, when the Jews were taking captive the Lord in the garden, Peter was the first to draw his sword, and he slashed into the mob, notwithstanding that he and only one other armed person opposed so many who were well equipped. Now who would have believed that one so valiant, who so faithfully stands by his Master, would so soon afterwards shamefully betray Him? In the garden no one attempted to hurt Peter and his fellow disciples, for the Lord's "Let these go" protected them. And especially here in the house of Caiaphas no one desires to injure them. But when, altogether incidentally, and perhaps through sympathy^ the damsel that kept the door said unto Peter: "Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?" his courage failed him, and he feared that he would have to share his Master's fate if he should answer yes, and, therefore, he denies that he is a disciple. And when he was accosted on this point the second time and the third, he began to curse and to swear, calling upon God to visit upon him His wrath if he had ever known or seen the man.

Let us pay due attention to the conduct of Peter, so that we may learn properly to know ourselves and other people, and to beware of presumptuousness. For if such a denial of faith can proceed from Peter, who, above all the other disciples, had a heart filled with loyalty and love for the Lord Jesus, yea, who was so enlightened by the grace of God that even Christ said unto him: "Blessed art thou, Simon, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven," and that He gave to him the name Cephas, "a stone," how much more easily can not such denial come from us poor mortals, who are much inferior to Peter in point of gifts, and, in all other respects, much more faint and frail? Be on thy guard, therefore; be not irreverently bold; think not that thou hast climbed the mountain and art out of danger; remember that thy flesh is totally corrupt! Neither doth Satan slumber, but walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whose heart he may trouble, and whom he may cast down or even devour. Therefore, be vigilant; live in the fear of God; build upon His grace alone, and in Him repose thy trust and confidence! And let that which Jesus spake in the garden to Peter, James and John, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation," be spoken also unto thee, that thou mayest neither snore nor be falsely secure, as though there were no danger and no need for fear from henceforth, but that thou mayest watch and be sober, not doubting that thy arch-enemy is close at hand, yea, that thou bearest him in

thy bosom! Thou wouldst, therefore, be lost, should God not stand by thee with His Holy Spirit. Thou canst neither govern nor restrain thyself one single hour. Therefore, say: I will pray God to give me His Holy Spirit, that He may rule and rightly lead me, and either ward off disturbance and temptation, or else graciously succor me and suffer me not to fall! This is the first point presented by our narrative. Under this head, however, appropriately comes the solemn admonition of the Lord, given in the 21. chapter of Luke: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness;" for we are just as ill-bred as the brute, which, when well fed, shows its insolence. He who has plenty and to spare, readily forgets God and His Word, or else cares very little for them; and then, before he knows it, he is entangled in the devil's net. Therefore, wouldst thou be out of danger, observe these three things: fear God, be watchful and sober, and pray without ceasing! For, although we must still feel temptation's thrusts, and sometimes fall because of weakness, God, through His Holy Spirit, will lift us up again, and not suffer us to remain victims of temptation.

In the second place, we find consolation in this narrative. Here we clearly see the fruit of our Lord Jesus' sufferings; and Peter's conduct plainly pictures to us not only the grace and mercy of God, but also the way in which grace may be regained by us when lost in unrighteousness and sin. Terrible and heinous is the fall of Peter; as such he feels it most forcibly, and, therefore, he cannot longer bear to mingle with men, but steals away and weeps bitterly.

But here we find that the Lord not only foretold to him his fall, but afterwards also received him into favor without punishing him as his sin had deserved. For on Easter, before the Lord Jesus had shown Himself, the angel who was at the grave commanded the women to announce to His disciples, and to Peter especially, that the Lord had risen. And the Lord Himself, soon after He had appeared to Magdalene and the other women, appeared to Peter and comforted him. This all works together for our consolation, teaching us not to banish from our hearts confidence in God's grace, though we may have fallen, but, seeing how the Lord deals with Peter, to be assured that He has died on our account, and that His sufferings shall bring us consolation and assistance, although we are poor sinners. For if sinners are not to have the benefit of the sufferings of Christ, then would

He have rejected His disciples, and particularly Peter, first of all, and nevermore have interested Himself for them, because they were all offended because of Him, fled from Him, and so shamefully denied Him. But the merciful Lord does not so; they are still His dear disciples, notwithstanding that they disgraced their calling. Let us mark this and apply it to our hearts for consolation; for thus will our gracious God also deal with us.

But, say you, what becomes of poor Judas? Do we not see him cut off from all grace? Although we shall come to speak of this hereafter, it is still necessary for us, in this connection, to know what it was that furthered and preserved Peter, and what it was that subjected Judas to impediments and despair, so that Peter's case may teach us how to take care of ourselves and how to beware of that which befell Judas. Now we must make a distinction between Peter and Judas with reference to the heinousness of their crimes. For, while both transgress the will of God and subject themselves to everlasting condemnation, Judas' sin is greater than that of Peter. Judas surrenders to sin voluntarily and with premeditation, and, notwithstanding the Lord's frequent and fervent warnings, prefers his sins above Christ's love. This is not the case with Peter; his sin was accidental, not deliberate and malicious; his denial of Christ was the result of casual diffidence or weakness. Had he apprehended this result, he would not have entered the house of Caiaphas. Then, there is this further distinction between Peter and Judas, that the former, unlike the latter, is not the enemy of Christ and does not hate Him; that he does not run counter to the Lord, like the latter, with such wanton scorn, hatred and obstinacy that no exhortation to penitence and no favor of the Lord can influence him to repent; but that, before he considers and perceives what he is doing, through fear and weakness he is so overcome that he denies his dear Lord and begins to curse and to swear.

Let us mark well the aforementioned distinction in regard to sins, viz.: that, although both Peter and Judas do sin, and thus subject themselves to the judgment of God, the sin of Judas is more enormous than the sin of Peter. For the Lord subsequently makes the difference between Pilate and the Jews, saying, John 19., "He that hath delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." This is the reason why the conscience of Judas is more painfully wounded than Peter's, and his sufferings are more severe; the

burden borne by Judas is by far the heavier and the more oppressive. Nevertheless, Peter's sin had deserved death, as well as that of Judas.

This distinction is justified also by St. Paul, who says of his persecuting Christ and His believers that he had done this in ignorance, and that, although his work of persecution was a damnable, mortal sin, it was still not at all to be compared with the persecutions carried on by the chief priests and Pharisees. This difference deserves to be diligently regarded, so that we may beware of such wanton and malicious sins as of a most grievous burden, and therefore watch that we do not obstinately persevere in impenitence. Now, although sins may be classified according to the degree of their criminality, and although no doubt exists that the greater the sin, the greater the consequent torment of conscience; still, when a man has obtained knowledge of his sins and is terrified by the wrath of God, he must not judge the measure of forgiveness and grace by the enormity or number of his sins. All sins, even the least, are so great and serious that we are not able to estimate their heinousness; yea, so great that we could not endure one of them, were it adequately seen and felt by us. Besides, Satan can so magnify a sin, though it be not the greatest, that the timid, fearful soul which is guilty of it supposes that no one else on earth has ever committed so grievous a crime. Therefore, we must know and hold fast the Gospel doctrine of the grace and kindness of the Son of God; for this tells us that grace is mightier than all sin. It is the great object of God's Word and promises that no one may despond or despair on account of sin but that all may trust in the grace of God through His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus.

On this point Judas and Peter differ. Judas looks only at the enormity of his sins, falls into despair, thinks that all eternity can afford him neither counsel nor aid, and then the poor fellow goes and hangs himself. And why? Simply because he had despised God's Word and had not been bettered by it. When he now stood in need of consolation, but did not have the Word and desired not to turn to the Lord Jesus in faith, he was beyond all reach of help, Peter also wept bitterly, and feared and trembled on account of his sins, but he had more diligently heard and better remembered the Word of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, when he now finds himself in distress, he makes use of the Word, thinks of that which Christ has told him, clings to this, consoles himself with it, and hopes that God will be merciful

to him. In such misery this is the true relief, which poor Judas lacked. But that this was really the course Peter took, and that he did abide by God's Word and grace, the Lord testifies in the 22. chapter of Luke, saying: "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." While he was denying Christ, we do not see that there was a spark of faith in his heart; but afterwards, when his conscience was aroused and he was tortured by it, his faith returned, preserving to him this Word of Christ, and preventing him from falling into despair.

Let us then learn here what true repentance is. Peter "wept bitterly." In this way repentance begins; the heart must truly perceive sin and be sincerely sorry for it, so that our delight in it, our love for it, and our living in it may cease. Our having disobeyed God's will and sinned, must be for us a source of heartfelt affliction.

Our might, however, cannot bring this about; but the Lord calls us to repent and makes His face to shine again upon us, just as He here calls and admonishes Peter by the crowing of the cock, of which He had told him before, and by turning and looking upon him. For we are by nature so disposed that we delight in sin and take pleasure in committing it continually. We see this in the case of Peter; for, after he had denied Christ once, he still keeps on until he has denied Him thrice, and cursed and sworn: "I do not know the man," being concerned about nothing. But when the cock crows and the Lord turns to look upon him, Peter immediately pauses and considers what he has done. Now, according to our nature and to the nature of sin, sin cannot help but terrify us, threaten us with God's wrath, and fill our hearts with anguish, as was the case with both Peter and Judas. Judas, when he perceived his sin, became so uneasy that he did not know what to do with himself. And Peter's agony was so great that it compelled him to flee from his fellow men and give vent to his grief in tears, of which he could not shed enough.

When we feel such terror and anguish our best course is, first, to humble ourselves before God and freely confess our sins: O God, I am indeed a poor, miserable sinner, and, shouldst Thou depart from me with Thy grace, am able only to sin; and then, to abide God's Word and promises, adding: "But be merciful to me for the sake of Thy Son, Jesus Christ!" When the soul thus seeks to console itself with God's Word, and sincerely trusts that God, for His Son's sake, will be merciful, then must the anguish abate and

comfort surely follow. True and complete repentance, then, is this: to be terrified and humbled by sin, and to find comfort in the Lord Jesus and His sufferings through faith.

Thus, no doubt, Peter consoled himself with the word spoken to him by the Lord at the passover:

“Satan bath desired to have you, but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not,” Luke 22. For, although his heart was filled with anxiety and sorrow, he did not despair like Judas. True, at first this consolation was as small as a grain of mustard seed. But since the ground, on which this little consolation rested, was God’s own Word and promises, it increased wonderfully, and when Peter met Christ again, on holy Easter-day, it had grown so great that all terrors and all doubts had fled, and nothing remained except heart-felt humility, with which to confess his weakness and cheerfully to acknowledge himself a sinner. Sin was not able to leave aught in Peter’s heart except this weakness and this confession. This consolation, like a mighty deluge, suffocated, yea, quenched the fire that had threatened to consume his heart. Since, therefore, we cannot live without temptation, we should prepare for it in time, and especially with diligence hear God’s Word, and practice and remember it, so that consolation, like Peter’s, may be ours in time of sorrow.

Thus we find that this example of St. Peter is given us for instruction and for consolation. We should learn from it, first, to flee false security and to live in the fear of God; for it is an easy matter even for great saints terribly to fall. But, secondly, we must also learn from this example to cling to God’s Word, and to draw comfort from it, even when we have fallen, so that we may not, like Judas, despair on account of sin. For God does not wish any one to exalt himself on account of his endowments, for which reason we all should fear, watch and pray; neither does He, on the other hand, wish any one to be driven into despair by his sins. The Son of God became man and died upon the cross for the very purpose of banishing such evils. Therefore, if thou wouldst be a true Christian, fear God and confide in His grace and Word, and thou shalt always find consolation, deliverance and help. May our dear Father in Heaven, through His Holy Spirit, grant this to us all, for the sake of our blessed Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Sixth Passion Sermon. Christ is Delivered to Pilate. – Judas Hangs Himself. – The Potter's Field. (Translated by Isensee). Matt. 27:1-10

When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death: and when they had bound Him, they led Him away, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor. Then Judas, which had betrayed Him. when he saw that He was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of Him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

You have heard, my friends, how the Lord Jesus was first led to Annas, who then sent Him bound to Caiaphas, where the chief priests and scribes were assembled, and where these latter and the entire council sought false witness against Him, and finally falsely accused Him of blasphemy, for

which, they said, He ought to die. We expect to speak further on this hereafter.

Next we find Him brought before Pilate; we shall see what happened there. But before we speak of this, we ought to know what was, after all, the reason why the chief spiritual and temporal rulers at Jerusalem were so highly incensed and embittered against the Lord that they flock together by night, make inquisition concerning Him at an unseasonable hour, and are in such uneasy haste to have Him destroyed, at the same time being unable to allege aught against Him except invented lies. It would be too lengthy, however, to relate all this now; each one can read it for himself in the history written by the four Evangelists, or learn it during the year from the preaching of the Word at Church.

The Lord Jesus excuses neither the doctrine nor the life of these men, but censures both severely. Thus He calls them “an evil and adulterous generation,” a “generation of vipers,” and not the children of God, which they boast themselves to be, but “the children of the devil,” because they can neither speak, teach, nor do that which is good. And shortly previous to this time, before He was taken. He gave them a final rebuke, calling down upon them, Matt. 23., the eight times uttered “woe!” And this it was that enkindled their hatred into such consuming flames, that lent cruelty to their enmity, and that made them so impetuous in the pursuit of their object, that Christ, being now in their power, had no opportunity to escape. Still, in order to give their savage, murderous hatred a plausible appearance, that is, to make it seem that their law fully authorized them to kill Christ, the high priest, as the Evangelists write, when he heard Christ say: “Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven;” rent his clothes and said: “He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. What think ye?” And all the others who were present said: “He is guilty of death.” Soon after this they began to treat the dear Lord Jesus most miserably, not one among them having compassion on Him, but all of them enraged against Him like raving lions. The 22. and other Psalms tell us about this.

One thing, however, was still in their way. They knew very well that Pilate would care very little for that which they deemed sufficient cause for death; for He was a Gentile and had not received command of the Roman

Emperor to execute the Jews because of their faith, – else he would have had to destroy all of them. For this reason they assembled when the morning was come, and, as Matthew writes, “took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death,” that is, they considered what accusation they would bring against Him before Pilate. For they knew well enough that Pilate would not slay Christ on account of His having blasphemed in the judgment of the Jews. They found it necessary, therefore, to devise some specious, civil charge to be presented to Pilate, who was a temporal judge. For, by saying that Christ was a blasphemer, they could not have broken His neck.

Let us here see and learn how quick and venomous Satan is when men stand in need of advice how to kill Christ! The first word spoken by Pilate to Christ is his question: “Art Thou the king of the Jews?” This question clearly shows that, in this consultation of the Jews, they had agreed, as stated, to accuse the Lord Jesus before Pilate of desiring to excite sedition and to set Himself up for the king of the Jews. But what ground have they for such a charge? Where has Christ ever called Himself a king? Where has He attempted to pass Himself off as a lord? If they had been willing they might, on the other hand, have testified how He refused, departed and hid Himself, when the people attempted to take Him by force to make Him a king. They might have told too that He had commanded them not to keep back from Caesar that which belonged to him, but to render to him his due. Now, we must also consider that Pilate could hardly have been satisfied with bare accusations, but must certainly have demanded proofs. And how were these furnished? No doubt, as follows. They had heard Christ confess to the chief priest that He was the Christ. Then they took the evidence of the Scriptures, showing from the Prophets how Christ should be a king. For Zechariah says: “Behold thy King cometh unto thee; He is just and having salvation, etc.,” and Hosea, in his 3. chapter, “They shall seek David their king;” and many other passages express the same. Therefore, since the Lord acknowledges Himself to be the Christ, He thereby acknowledges Himself to be also the king of the Jews. Behold, how accurate the researches of the devil!

But concerning that which goes against them and might serve the Lord Jesus, they are silent. Where Zechariah says: “Behold thy King cometh unto thee; He is just, and having salvation,” he immediately adds, “lowly,” that is, He shall be a spiritual King, who shall justify His own that believe in

Him, and deliver them from death and all evil, that they might have consolation through Him against sin and God's wrath, – not a temporal king having business with money and possessions. He implies that God has ordained other kings who should control nations and individuals and possess opulence and power; but that these kings should not impart righteousness and salvation, which gifts are brought and bestowed alone by this King, of whom the Prophet says, "Behold thy King cometh," etc. These villains do not mention a syllable of this, but the naked idea that Christ had made Himself the king of the Jews is what they dress up for Pilate's sight. Thus Pilate, who would not have assisted them had their charge not exceeded what it was at first, viz., heresy and blasphemy, was beguiled into participating in their work.

Just so it goes today; for civil governments, at any rate, usually have the fault that they care very little for the kingdom of God and for religion. When kings and princes enjoy allegiance, tribute and royal glory, they are careless about everything else, and thus are satisfied that Pilate's throne should be the only one before which Christ appears. But the chief priests and elders of the people, i. e. the blood-thirsty mob composed of Pope, cardinal, bishops, monks and priests, come and accuse Christ before Pilate; they instigate the temporal authorities, such as emperors, kings and princes against the Gospel, as the Jews incited Pilate against Christ, saying that it teaches insurrection and that, unless its influence is checked in time, every subject will become a rebel. They urge the authorities to oppose the Gospel with zeal, if they would not have prosperity and happiness to forsake their scepter. Yea, these bloody, papal asses preach to the princes that it is the Gospel's fault that the Turk assails us and that we are not more successful in repelling him, – that the Gospel must be blamed for the great failures in our crops and for our being surrounded by misfortunes. By this means they arouse Pilate, who otherwise is not at all concerned about Christ and His preaching, to expose the Lord, and finally to command Him to be nailed to the cross.

Now, it cannot be helped that such falsehoods and virulent slander bring about painful results. But for this very reason have the Evangelists left us this history, so that, when like things come upon us, we may patiently bear them, saying, My Lord Jesus had to suffer the same. The servant is not better than his lord. Pilate would have permitted Christ to preach and

perform miracles all His life, and would never have thought of interfering; but the high priests, the heartless horde, bring it to pass that Pilate as judge and Christ as criminal are brought together.

And so it is still; the Lord Jesus' greatest enemies are Pope, cardinal, bishops, monks and priests. When they have branded as heresy that which does not please them, or that which opposes them, they seek to hunt down the Gospel through worldly potentates; these latter must be their executioners and must, like Pilate, bedaub themselves with innocent blood, on the accusation and at the solicitation of these enemies. Pious Christian, bear it all! With thy Lord Jesus too they sported thus. Therefore, give thanks to God that thou art counted worthy to suffer for His name, as Luke tells us, in the 5. chapter of Acts, that the Apostles did! So much for the first part of our text

The second part relates the terrible example of Judas. This the Evangelists so diligently portray that we may, as in a picture, recognize the peculiar character and nature of sin, and learn to shun it. For in Judas' case we see both how silently sin at first creeps in, but also how it afterwards causes such a horrible end.

We have heard, on a former occasion, what a seemingly small beginning this monstrous sin of Judas had, viz., that it began with his natural avarice and love of money. But its real fountainhead we find in Judas' being such a godless hypocrite and such a wicked, desperate despiser of God. Thus, when the opportunity to make money out of the Lord Jesus presented itself, he regarded it a trifling matter to betray his innocent Lord and Master. Besides, he thinks it quite a prize that he can so soon possess himself of such an amount of money. At the Last Supper the Lord admonishes Judas so pointedly and so often, that he could not have misunderstood Him. But let the Lord preach to him and warn him ever so faithfully, it is all in vain; Judas does not lose sight of his object; his heart is riveted to the thirty pieces of silver! What a faithful, stern and earnest warning was not that which the Lord Jesus gave him, saying: "He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me;" again: "The Son of man goeth as it is written of Him; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born!" Should not Judas have taken these words to heart? Should he not have repented, saying: Great God, what have I not suffered the devil to put into my soul,

miserable fellow that I am! But he does nothing of the kind; on the contrary, when he is so faithfully warned, he even asks whether his intentions are known. He puts the question: "Master, is it I?" The Lord answers him: "Thou hast said," i. e., yes, thou art he. But this matter, as already said, gave him no care nor trouble, because it was the means by which he could obtain so much money.

This should be remembered; for if we wish a correct picture of sin it must be painted as seeming at first sight an indifferent, simple thing, which is not at all dangerous. In committing sin men do not concern themselves about God's wrath; they fear no misfortune and they regard sin not as a burden, but as a little feather which a breath can balance in the air or drive away. Therefore, when sin assails us we do not fear it; yea, we rejoice in it and love it, and we even think that the more we can sin in doing our work, the better our work shall be done. Suppose we illustrate this by the case of an avaricious usurer, an adulterer or a drunkard. Upon such Paul passes an appalling judgment, when he says, 1 Cor. 6: "Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor covetous, nor drunkards shall inherit the kingdom of God." This terrible decree is written here, is preached too, and the very ones who are subject to such vices get to hear it; but they accept it no more than Judas accepted it. Could they only dispose of their property so as to make it yield them twenty or thirty percent; could only their evil desires be satisfied; could they only have gay companions every day and be jolly and drunk every night, – then would they think themselves very fortunate and, neither caring for nor grieving over the judgment pronounced upon them, be in good spirits, and perfectly merry.

This is spoken for the common people who grossly tread in Judas' footsteps. But exceedingly dreadful it is that today the Pope and his minions persecute and condemn God's Word, the acknowledged truth, invent many base and blasphemous lies against this Word, and induce worldly potentates to use their power against it and to exterminate the truth of God and all who hold it, so that Judas' trade may be made to flourish as formerly. And then they are so utterly blind and obdurate that their conscience does not trouble them, and that they think it would be an excellent thing to overflow this land with blood. What blindness, – what diabolical enmity against Christ's Word and the true Church! But more of this hereafter.

Adam preached the same thing to Cain, his son, and warned him against sin, when he perceived what hatred there was in his heart toward his brother Abel. He says to him, Gen. 4: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." By this he meant to say: Make thyself well acquainted with sin; for when it attacks a man it always is as a wild, rapacious beast, which pretends to be asleep and lets men handle and stroke it; no one fears and no one is hurt. Even as innocent as this does sin seem. It is a smooth, pretty kitten, which permits itself to be played with and caressed. But be careful, saith Adam; it sleeps, indeed, but will not sleep forever. "Why not? Because it"lieth at the door," in a public place, where every one comes and goes; nothing easier, therefore, than that it should awake. And then it will be a furious lion, an angry bear, tearing to pieces and destroying all in its way. Now, as Adam had foretold to Cain, so it came. Adam commanded him to conquer sin, and not let sin rule and lead him. But Cain gave no heed; he let sin have its own way; he slew his brother. Sin did not rest long here; its sleep was soon over, and then it tortured Cain until he did not know where to stay. He dared not remain with his father and mother, and besides, had fears for his body and his life.

Let us mark well this second characteristic of sin! At first it sleeps and seems a trifling, harmless thing. But it sleeps not long, and when it awakes it becomes a grievous burden which we cannot bear without God's special help. This we see in the case of the traitor Judas. While sin rested, it was impossible for him to fear; the glossy fur deceived him so, that he did not perceive the sharp, poisonous claws. But its rest could not last a great while, for it lay at the door where it could be easily waked. Where all pleading and all admonition failed before, now a single moment comes and drives such terror to his soul that he knows not what to do. For when he sees the Lord led to Pilate he fears that the Lord's life is imperiled, is sorry, and now perceives, for the first time, what he has done. Now sin awakes and, according to its natural way, acts with such fury and horror that he cannot bear it. Before, he so loved the thirty pieces of silver that, for the sake of having them, he could betray and sell the Lord Jesus without a pang; now, the matter stands reversed. If he now had the money and wealth of all the world, he would give it all to save the Lord Jesus' life. Since it was love of money that made him so miserable, and his purpose to possess it that brought this sin upon him, he now hates money so, that he has neither rest nor peace in its possession, but runs after the high priests into the temple,

confesses that he has done wrong, and offers to give them back the money if they will only liberate Jesus. And when the chief priests will not do this, to get rid of the money at all events he casts it down at their feet. Now, this is the peculiar character of sin; when it awakes it so violently attacks conscience and preaches a sermon of such horrors that the frightened heart knows not what to do and what not to do. And sin inflicts the further calamity, that, as little as is the consolation which the poor creature finds in himself, so little too is the comfort he derives from others. Judas honestly tells the chief priests his troubles. Alas, he says, "I have sinned, – I have betrayed the innocent blood!" But how do they console him? "What is that to us? see thou to that," they tell him. They shove everything over to the shoulders of Judas, and let the intolerable load lie there, unwilling in the least to help the poor, frightened soul with words of consolation or of counsel.

Now follows the third and last calamity. For when it so happens that sin persists in castigating conscience, the devil does not loiter, but pokes and blows the fire until the red flames rage within, and all attempts at rescue seem vain. In such fear and agony Judas is urged on by Satan until he goes out quickly, and in his misery hangs himself. Now, this is the end which Satan from the beginning sought to bring about by sin. He who could, at the beginning, consider and credit this end, would surely pray and guard against it. But it is hidden; sin is very quiet, and does not disclose in the start what its final object is. So much for the history of poor, unhappy Judas, who for a trifle sold the Lord Jesus, and who not only did not enjoy this money, but also lost on its account body, life, soul and salvation.

Therefore, study well this example, and let its memory never more depart; for it is to help me and you and all of us to an accurate knowledge of sin, and to serve us as a shield against it. If we do not mark this example and learn from it to know sin, we are liable to be deceived by sin and are exposed to the damage which it does. For, in the first place, it is the nature of sin so to flatter and please the old Adam that he delights in it and loves it; but this lasts only until sin awakes. Then, in the second place, follow trouble, toil, fear, danger, terrors, tremblings, despair and, finally, eternal death. Let us recognize these two features of sin from the case of Judas, and not suffer ourselves to be deluded like the world, which accepts neither instruction nor reproof, being deceived by sin's beautiful, fair and cheerful

countenance! Many a citizen, peasant and nobleman knows how to make an easy living. If he has anything for sale, he tries to get the highest price. When he buys, he tries to buy as cheap as possible. He is not content with what his houses have brought him hitherto, but raises the rent. And When he disposes of money, wheat or other commodities, he has an eye to his best interests. Such a course soothes and pleases our Adam's nature. Every one thinks his shrewdness to have been admirable when he, by some means or other, has obtained and laid by in one year, say one, two or three hundred dollars, according to the nature of his business. Hence we see every one pursuing his daily bread, and this with all manner of haste.

This is the very sin of which Judas was guilty in the beginning of his career. The world today does just as Judas did; it does not fear this sin and thinks there is no danger in it. But why? Simply because sin rests and sleeps and rarely shows its nature in the start. Sin paints and adorns itself; it puts on the mask of beauty and of youth; in this way it hides its hideousness. But if we could at once unmask it and wash off its paint with strong lye, we would run away from it as from the devil. No one would consent to extortion and addict himself to avarice, if he knew what the consequence will be when sin begins to rack the conscience and when remorse comes. For the numerous examples which we have, prove that people who pursue only money and possessions, cannot in the last hour abandon their accustomed course of thought. In that hour their hearts are closed to all consolation from God's Word, for their thoughts are even then rambling through the counting-room, the market and the warehouse, and engaged with this or that debt not yet collected. In short, thorns have so enclosed them that they cannot flee; or else their consciences are so molested as to make them totally unfit for taking comfort.

What has been said applies not only to the bag of Judas i. e., avarice, but to all sins. For, no matter where it sleeps, sin finally must awake, and it always then creates such wretchedness as was that of Judas. Still, this is done especially in the true disciples of Judas, who, for the sake of money and possessions, oppose the Word of God, persecute the Gospel, and give occasion for false doctrine and idolatry. Such disciples are the Pope, his cardinals, bishops, worthless lords, priests, monks, doctors and the like, who crowd around Judas' bag and fight for it. No wonder, for this bag is not prickly and thorny, but its touch is very soft and velvety; in other words, the

world loudly applauds those who have succeeded in securing sufficient means for living at ease and in splendor. Besides, it seems a trifle to violate the Word of God in this respect or that, thus sinning against the acknowledged truth, and to act contrary to one's convictions; yea, it seems an easy thing for the prebendary who occupies the cathedral, and for the minister who moderates himself, to justify their unwillingness to speak the truth openly. For the world and the devil pay big wages for such work. But when sin awakes, the little, black, rabid dog, Remorse, will surely come, and touch and terrify thy conscience so, that thou shalt find consolation nowhere, and thus be hurled into despair by the machinations of the devil. Then shalt thou have received the same reward with Judas.

It were well, therefore, to consider this danger in time, to forego bishoprics, canonries, Epicureanism and the like, to resolve to be a Christian, to further and confess God's Word, and to walk before God with a clear conscience. Even if we had no superabundance of bread, God would still give us our daily, bread and not suffer us to starve, for He says: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you."

The following, therefore, is what this history teaches. Since sin, at first, is quiet and sleeps, but afterward awakes and fills conscience with all misery, by which Satan then drives his victims into despair, we should beware of sin, do nothing against our better knowledge and, besides, ask God daily, yea, every moment, for His Holy Spirit, that He may not lead us into temptation, but mercifully save us from falling and shield us from sin. It has already been stated that we are not apprehensive of the evil results of sin, because sin is not awake in the beginning, but sleeps, and that deception and ruin, therefore, are very near us. For this reason we ought to pray without ceasing, and be very careful everywhere, so that sin may not steal upon us unawares.

But when the fall has occurred and we have been deceived, and when sin, which slept at first, now awakes, appears to us and upbraids us, we must be prepared for this encounter, and from the example of Judas we can learn how to be prepared. For how clearly do we not see what was the matter with Judas! Satan converted his sin into a mountain so huge and lofty that it shut out from his sight God, together with His Word, His promises and His mercy; hence, he simply despairs. Now, when we trace this confusion back to its origin, can we deny that Judas could have

consoled himself even in such great distress, had he not set at naught God's Word, but more eagerly studied and obeyed it? Having always despised and neglected the Word, is it to be wondered at that now, when he stands in need of its comfort and aid he must do without them? Therefore, as we must, on the one hand, guard ourselves, with godliness and constant prayer, against sleeping sin, so that we may not be deceived and seduced; so also, on the other hand, when sin awakes, and chastises and disturbs us, we must defend and support ourselves with the Holy Gospel. This Gospel shows us Christ as Him who suffered and made satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. And in this Gospel we find that God, the Almighty Creator and Father, desires not the death of a sinner; but that He does desire the sinner to return and live, that is, to acknowledge and lament his sins and to hope for forgiveness through the Lord Jesus. But Judas had not these Gospel gifts; hence he despaired.

Again, Peter also fell shamefully, and experienced such pangs as those of Judas. Sin slept at first; in other words, his denying Christ did not seem specially dangerous to Peter; but it finally awakes and so torments his heart that he cannot sufficiently bewail his fall, or, as the Evangelists have it, "He went out and wept bitterly." But why is it that Peter does not hang himself like Judas? Simply because Peter, no doubt, remembered the Word of the Lord Jesus; this saved him. He must have remembered that the Lord had prophesied to him that he should fall, and also that He had comforted him, saying, as we read Luke 22., "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

This sermon Peter heard and kept. This Word was the staff that supported him; sin could not now crush him to earth; had it been otherwise, sin would have done with him as it did with Judas. God's Word saved him. O, learn this well, and thus be prepared for like emergencies; hear God's Word frequently; never go to bed and never rise from sleep without repeating one, two, three or four of its beautiful passages!

Christ says,

Matt. 9: "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Matt. 11: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek

and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your soul. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

John 3: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him: might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned.” Again,

John 3: “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life: but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

John 5: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.”

John 11: “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”

1 John 2: “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

If we daily practice such and similar passages, and by practicing familiarize ourselves with them, we then possess the infallible remedy for all spiritual ailments. But unhappy Judas had not this remedy at hand.

We have more such examples. Dreadful was the fall of David; his was a more heinous sin than were the sins which king Saul committed in the beginning of his apostasy. How, then, are we to account for it that Saul cuts his throat, while David finds deliverance? Saul had not God’s Word; therefore, when sin raged and reproached him, he could not defend himself; for he had nothing on which to lay hold. Sin, when it awaked, reproached David also, and with such severity that he himself pronounced his judgment, saying, that he had deserved to die. But in this time of need he holds to the word. of the prophet Nathan, who tells him that God is gracious, and that He will not impute to him his sin. Let us, then, learn well this second lesson taught us here, viz., not only to shun sin, but also, when sin awakes, to be able to contend with it and to protect ourselves. But

during our whole life we must prepare for such distress, equipping ourselves with the Word of God, else we shall have no aid nor counsel, as Judas' case shows plainly. How Judas rejoiced at first over the thirty pieces of silver! They were in his sight as a meadow mown, for sin rested not. But when sin awoke, these thirty pieces of silver became a burden which he could not bear, and so, to relieve his conscience of this load, he hanged himself. All he effected by this means, however, was, that he had to bear the burden in eternity. Of such an end beware; do not let sin creep in; live in the fear of God; keep conscience clear, and attentively hear God's Word: then consolation shall be thine in need of every kind!

The Evangelists further relate that the chief priests took counsel about the thirty pieces of silver. They would not put them into the treasury, but bought with them the potter's field, of which they made a burial-place for strangers. The prophecy, of which this was the fulfillment, does not appear remarkable. However, since the Evangelist takes the pains to quote that which the prophet Zechariah had predicted long before, the prophecy cannot be meaningless, but must have its peculiar signification. The following is, no doubt, its proper explanation.

The citizens of Jerusalem had their cemeteries, while strangers, as we see here, had none. Now, in the true Jerusalem, the Christian Church, we find that the Jews, according to the 147. Psalm, are God's people: "He showeth His Word unto Jacob." But to us Gentiles, who are strangers, the kingdom of God does not belong; for the same Psalm continues to sing: "He hath not dealt so with any nation," etc. But the thirty pieces of silver, for which our dear Lord Jesus was sold, have bought a burial-place for us pilgrims too; that is, the innocent sufferings and death of Christ have blessed us Gentiles also with the hope of everlasting life. For the Lord had to bleed and die in consequence of being sold for thirty pieces of silver. Therefore, the Evangelist teaches us from the Prophets that we should not forget for whom the Lord was sold, for whom He suffered, and for whom He died. It was not alone for His people, to whom He had been promised, but also for us Gentiles, who before had no final resting-place in the true Jerusalem. Those thirty pieces of silver, which Judas received for Christ, have bought us a share in the acre of our God. Now we shall be laid into that glorious grave, bed-chamber magnificent, from which our Lord Jesus

will call us forth on the judgment-day, when He shall also give us everlasting joy.

May our dear Father in heaven grant us this through His Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Seventh Passion Sermon. Christ Accused Before Pilate And Condemned To Death. (Translated by Isensee) Matt. 27:11-31.

And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked Him, saying, Art Thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest. And when He was accused of the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto Him, Hearest Thou not how many things they witness against Thee? And He answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marveled greatly. Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered Him. When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let Him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath He done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let Him be crucified.

When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto Him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped Him, and put on Him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head. And after that they had mocked Him, they took the robe off from Him, and put His own raiment on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.

In a recent sermon you heard, dear friends, how the Lord Jesus was tried before the chief priest. We are now ready to learn what happened Him after He was delivered to Pilate. Each Evangelist has his own way of relating these things and does not go into all the details, but one states this, another that, for which reason it is necessary to compile the items stated by each, and then to relate these items in their historical order.

The first item is furnished by the Evangelist John, who says that when, early in the morning, they led Jesus from the palace of Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment, they themselves went not in, lest they should be defiled and become disqualified to eat the passover. Since they were required to separate themselves from those as unclean who accidentally entered a house in which some one had died, they concluded that it might defile them to go into the judgment hall, in which the sentence of death was pronounced. It did not occur to these blind people that it was a far greater sin to shed innocent blood. Such holiness prevails among our Papists too, who think that eating flesh on Friday or eggs in the passion-week is a much greater sin than to persecute and strangle poor Christians for the Gospel's sake. They go about the latter with hearts as light as though it were a trifle. But about the former, which is no sin at all, but merely a human prohibition, they are exceedingly conscientious. Since these holy people refuse to go into the hall of judgment, Pilate was constrained to go out to them. He asked them:

“What accusation bring ye against this man?” Impudently and with arrogance they reply: “If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up unto thee.” Just as if they were so upright and pious that we should not suppose them capable of undertaking anything wrong! But Pilate meets them nobly when he says: “Take ye Him, and judge Him according to your law.” This was as much as saying: It is not customary with us Romans to judge a man without first trying him; but if you Jews think it is right to do so, why, you may take and kill Him, but I will not. Thus we clearly see that the Jews, after they had taken all necessary counsel, still have no confidence in themselves; they fear that their accusation will not stand the test. Nevertheless, they are unwilling to accept Pilate’s decision without a reply, for it stung them to the quick, and therefore they answer: “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.” This meant: If we had the authority to do this, we should not have called on you; but the Emperor has taken criminal jurisdiction away from us and confided it to you; therefore, act according to your office.

John adds here: “That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which He spake, signifying what death He should die.” For, as we read Matthew 20. and Luke 17., Christ had foretold to His disciples that He should be delivered to the Gentiles. For the sake, however, of having a charge to make, they accused Him, as Luke writes, in these words: “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ a king.” Here we hear why they delivered Him to Pilate. But the account sufficiently shows how basely they belie our dear Lord. Christ could, indeed, have strongly confuted them by referring them to His words: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s;” but what good would it have done? He had to suffer Himself to be accused of being a rebel, of turning the nation away from the Emperor, of forbidding the paying of tribute, and of desiring to be a king.

Just so, at this day, the Pope, cardinals, bishops, monks and priests calumniate the holy Gospel, charging it with teaching sedition, and saying that unless it is opposed the temporal power will come into disrepute and no one will respect it. But let this not offend thee; thank God that thou knowest that they, the desperate miscreants, most invidious foes of the Lord Jesus and most malignant blasphemers of Christ’s Gospel, lie! For the Gospel

deals with other and loftier things: it teaches how we can be freed from sin and attain to eternal life, alone by believing in the Son of God. This is the character of the instructions given us by the Gospel; it does not meddle with worldly things, leaves these so to remain as God has already disposed of them by means of the temporal government, and exhorts to obedience to this government.

When Pilate now had heard the accusation, he was in no haste to act upon it, but, as John says, entered into the judgment hall again, ordered Jesus to be brought before him and asked Him, saying: “Art Thou the king of the Jews?” Jesus answered him: “Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?” As though He would say: O, if my enemies would acquit me, you would soon do so too; for I know that you do not regard me as a king nor as one who would be likely to make an uproar.

“Pilate answered: Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee unto me; what hast Thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto Him, Art Thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto Him, what is truth?” As if he would say: If Thou art a king sent to bear witness unto the truth, we have no reason to fear Thee; for, with this as Thy object, Thou wilt not injure the Emperor. The proud Gentile meant to say, in other words: Truth is not the cause of a great deal of strife. And this is only too true, and especially in these evil and latter days does truth go begging. It is deceitfulness, fraud, avarice, usury and the like that elevate a man in these times. But what is gained by these in the end will soon be seen.

When Pilate had sufficiently examined the Lord, he went out again unto the Jews and said: “I find in Him no fault at all,” – “I have found no fault in this man.” But the Jews, as Luke relates, “were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that He belonged unto Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad;

for he was desirous to see Him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned with Him in many words; but He answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. And Herod with his men of war set Him at naught, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves.”

Here some might wonder why the Lord converses so with Pilate, giving him all information, but refuses to speak one word with Herod, who, besides, was king of Galilee. The true reason for this we find in Herod’s being a totally abandoned scoundrel and, at the same time, a great hypocrite. He had lately caused John the Baptist to be beheaded, and lived a life of public scandal by having his brother Philip’s wife, and still pretended to be exceedingly pious. For this reason the Lord, in the Gospel, calls him a fox, – an animal of which the fur is the only valuable part, – a ravenous, but still a very cunning animal. Such people are not worthy of intercourse with others; they are hypocrites who adopt holy faces and gentle speech, as it is written of Herod in Mark 6., where it says that he “feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.” But such people are not in earnest. Scoffers they are, who regard the Gospel as a fable, and who look upon the Christian as a great fool for offending great lords and endangering his possessions by his faith. Let every one, therefore, avoid such people, and do as Christ here did with Herod, have no communication with them.

This also is worthy of observation here that just as Pilate and Herod, who before were enemies, now become friends by their contact with Christ the Lord, even so do we see men act in our day. Men who could not be reconciled among themselves before, are harmonious in their opposition to the Gospel. One bishop cannot agree with another, and one order cannot be friendly toward another order. Princes are dissatisfied with each other. Each one wishes to be the best, to have the preference, and to oppress and silence all the rest. But when Christ comes among them and His Gospel shows its might, they all unite, are the best friends in the world, and stand together with their goods and lives, as David prophesied long ago in the 2. Psalm.

After the Lord was brought again from Herod to Pilate, “Pilate,” so says Luke, “when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people; and behold, I, having examined Him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse Him; no, nor yet Herod; for I sent you to him; and lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto Him. I will therefore chastise Him and release Him. (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.)”

“And they had then,” says Matthew, as we have heard, “a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.” Him Pilate places before the Jews, together with Christ, that the Jews might choose between the two, hoping that no one would ask for Barabbas, as he was a great rebel and murderer, well worthy of death.

“But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas.” “And,” so Luke proceeds, “they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man and release unto us Barabbas; (who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) Pilate, therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath He done? I have found no cause of death in Him; I will therefore chastise Him, and let Him go. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that He might be crucified.”

Matthew writes that when Pilate “was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him.”

And this was, indeed, an excellent warning, sent perhaps by some good angel, who, in a dream, announced to Pilate’s wife the misfortunes and calamities which Pilate would bring upon himself and his house in case he should listen to the Jews and, at their command, destroy the innocent Jesus. But as admonitions were useless and vain in Judas’ case, so did they at last avail nothing with Pilate. Nevertheless, he resists the Jews for a while. The Jews, to whom Christ was promised, wish the most villainous murderer to live, but Him, the Prince of life, they are in haste to slay. Since in this way Pilate’s proposition to “let Him go” is discouraged, Pilate makes still

another effort: he takes Jesus and scourges Him, as the Evangelists continue to relate.

“Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto Him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped Him,” “and scourged Him,” “and put on Him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand” instead of a scepter; “and they bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him,” “and began to salute Him,” “saying, Hail, King of the Jews!” and smote Him in the face. “And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head,” “and bowing their knees worshiped Him.”

Here and throughout the entire Passion-history you will observe, dear Christian, how Satan poured out all his poisonous, bitter, hellish hatred, rage and fury upon our dear Lord in such a way that surely no human being ever has endured such great and dreadful suffering, torture, insult, abuse and derision as the Son of God; and this He bore for the sake of my sin, thy sin and the sin of all the world. But now, since the suffering and death of Christ are the only sacrifice that was able to expiate sin, it is easy to calculate how immensely great and terrible God’s wrath against sin must be; and also, how ineffably, yea, unfathomably great must be His grace and mercy toward us condemned beings, – that grace and mercy whereby He gave His only begotten Son to die an ignominious death upon the cross for our sins.

Now it was customary among the Romans to beat malefactors before executing them; for which reason Pilate commanded Christ also to be scourged. At the same time he still hopes and labors to liberate the Lord. Therefore he led Jesus forth, after the soldiers had scourged Him and put on Him the purple robe and the crown of thorns, and said to the Jews: “Behold, I bring Him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in Him.”

“Then,” says John, “came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!” meaning by this: You should be satisfied with such punishment as this, seeing that your accusations are so groundless and His innocence is so evident. But neither did he succeed in this way.

As soon as the chief priests and their officers saw Jesus, and perceived that Pilate still sought to acquit Him, “they cried out, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him.” Pilate was displeased with such great injustice, “for,” as we are informed by Matthew, “he knew that for envy they had delivered Him.” Therefore he answers them bluntly: “Take ye Him and crucify Him; for I find no fault in Him. The, Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.”

“When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art Thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto Him, Speakest Thou not unto me? knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.”

And this was also a powerful warning. For Pilate here went too far, thinking that in virtue of his authority Jesus’ fate was in his hands, to be decided for or against Him at his own pleasure, as temporal authorities in such pride commit many sins. No, Pilate, says Christ, you overdo this matter; keep within proper bounds. If you have power, you have it not of yourself; power comes from above. Therefore, use your power in such a manner that you may know how to give an account of its exercise, Pilate accepts this admonition, and seeks the more how he might release Him. But the Jews would not hear of such a thing and “cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend; whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar.”

“When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour,” i. e., about noon. “And he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!” in other words, You still maintain that He had made Himself a king. Alas, for the king! You do Him great injustice. Does He look like a king or like a seditious person? But all was vain; “They cried out, Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him! Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.” “When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made,” he was “willing to content the people” and “gave sentence that it should be

as they required,” and “took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children;” that is, if we do Him wrong, then may we and our children be punished for it. “Then released he Barabbas unto them,” – “him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus,” mocked and scourged, “to their will,” “to be crucified.” These are the things that happened the Lord Jesus before Pilate.

Eighth Passion Sermon. Explanation Of Several Points In The History Just Given. (Translated by Isensee)

This part of the history of our Lord Jesus furnishes us with many excellent points of Christian doctrine, laden with consolation. Since, however, the material presented here is too much for one sermon, and the narrative itself is sufficiently lengthy, we shall dwell only on three points. The first is this: Pilate and others frequently testify to the innocence of our dear Lord Jesus. The second: Christ witnessed a good confession before Pilate, – which is also highly extolled by St. Paul, 1 Tim. 6. The third: Both Pilate and the Jews treat the blood of the Lord as a trifle, but it afterward becomes an intolerable and everlasting burden, which sinks them into temporal and eternal misery.

With reference to the first point, you must have noticed throughout that Pilate always insists upon it that he finds no cause of death in Christ. His wife also sent unto him, telling him to have nothing to do with that just and innocent man. Pilate moreover discovers, from all the actions of the Jews and by diligent investigation, that the chief priests and elders were moved against Christ by nothing but malice and envy. Similar testimony, but in greater measure and more powerful, was borne after the death of Christ. Great and glorious miracles then were wrought. The sun lost his luster and deep darkness reigned, the veil of the temple was rent in twain, the earth did quake, the rocks rent, the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints arose. Then the centurion openly confessed: “Certainly this was a righteous man.” And all the people present, beholding and taking to heart

the things which were done, smote their breasts, to signify that the rash execution of the dear, innocent Lord gave them pain.

But of what use is this testimony? Why do the Evangelists so carefully relate it? Without a doubt, their only object is to point us to the counsel and will of God, and to admonish us to consider why the Lord, being innocent and just, had to suffer so. In other words, they wish, in view of the abundant proof that Christ was innocent and did not deserve to die, to make us firmer in our faith. They desire to convince us that whatever our blessed Lord Jesus suffered, He suffered for us; and that God laid these afflictions upon Him, and, although He was innocent, would not remove them, so that, by His bearing them, sin might be removed from us and we might be reconciled again to God.

Whenever, therefore, we read in any part of the Passion history how unjustly the Jews and Gentiles treated the Lord Jesus, how they smote Him before the high priest, set Him at naught before Herod, and mocked and scourged Him in the judgment hall, – whenever, I say, we hear of such treatment, no matter where it is recorded, our thoughts must run thus: Behold, He is innocent; He does not bear this for Himself; He has not merited this. But I and you and all of us have deserved this suffering; death and every misfortune did rest upon us because of sin; but here the innocent and holy Son of God appears, takes upon Himself my debts, thy debts, and the debts of all of us, and discharges them, so that we might be free. When these are our thoughts we shall have such comfort that our hearts cannot despair on account of their sin, and that we shall not flee from God as though He were a tyrant or an executioner; but that we shall turn unto Him with heart-felt confidence and praise and glorify His mercy, which, as Paul says in the 5. chap, of Romans, He commendeth toward us in that He delivered His only begotten Son, our Lord and Saviour, unto death, to die for us sinners. Who could or would doubt that God's intentions toward us are good and altogether gracious?

Sin had subjected all of us to the wrath of God and to death, and had transferred us into Satan's kingdom; eternal life was lost, and in its place had been inherited every calamity for time and for eternity. But our Father, merciful and gracious, comes to our relief, and, rather than permit us to remain in such misery, sends His only begotten Son, born of a virgin and made under the law, so that the law, although flesh and blood were unable

to do God's will, might not have been given in vain, but might be fulfilled by this Man for all other men. And finally God suffers Him to die upon the cross, by His innocent death to atone for our sins, so that we, being released from eternal death and from the kingdom of Satan, might receive eternal life and be the children of God.

Believing that this was done on thy account and for thy welfare, take it as thine own and let it comfort thee. And well may we do this; for here we bear not once, not twice, but many times, that all that Jesus suffers He suffers innocently. But why does God tolerate this, yea, why does He ordain and bring it about? Simply that thou mightest be comforted in Christ. He does not suffer for Himself, but for thee and for all mankind, even as John says: "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." For this reason John the Baptist calls Him "The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," that is, a divinely appointed Sacrifice, who takes the sin of all the world upon Himself, so that this sin may rest upon the world no longer. This accounts for the seeming inconsistency. He is the Son of God, perfectly holy and altogether without sin, and therefore it were but just that He should not be subject to the curse and to death. We are sinners and under the curse and wrath of God, and therefore it were but just that we should suffer death and damnation. But God has reversed this relation; He who knows no sin, who is altogether merciful, and in whom, as John says, dwells the fullness of God's grace, was made a curse for us and had to bear sin's punishment, while we, through Him, have obtained mercy and have become the children of God. We should, therefore, cling to this consolation and take special delight in such testimony for Christ's innocence. For what Christ innocently suffered was caused by our sins. Therefore His innocence comforts us against all sin and suffering; for His innocence is a sure and lasting evidence that His passion is for our benefit, and that our dear Lord and merciful Redeemer has suffered for us and paid our debts. However, since we shall have occasion to speak further of this when we come to Christ's crucifixion between the murderers, we shall now proceed to the second point.

St. Paul, 1 Tim. 6., admonishes Timothy thus: "I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession, that thou keep this

commandment,” that is, doctrine, “without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Because this passage mentions so directly the confession which our dear Lord Jesus made before Pilate, and Paul makes use of it for earnestly admonishing Timothy, we have reason to meditate upon this confession and to inquire what it is and what is its purpose. Now, the Gospels tell us plainly what it was that Christ confessed. When the Jews had accused Him of having said that He was a king, and Pilate had taken Him to task on this account, He did not deny, but confessed openly before Pilate: “My kingdom is not of this world,” i. e., my kingdom is no corporeal, earthly kingdom. Then Pilate asked again, “Art Thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.” Do you ask: But of what use was this confession to Paul in admonishing Timothy to keep the commandment, i. e. doctrine, pure and not to adulterate it? Truly, of much use! Everything, if we desire to be true ministers and Christians, depends upon our believing what Christ confessed, viz.: that He is a king; but that His kingdom is not of this world; that His only work in this world is to bear witness unto the truth. And it follows that His earthly subjects must be like Him, the King. He is indeed called a king; but when He is compared with Herod, Pilate and other temporal kings and rulers, he seems a poor, wretched man. Herod was a great, shining lord, who courted sensual delight, realized his heart’s desires, and was looked upon by all the world as glorious. So the world regarded Pilate too and others. But poor, innocent Christ bears no comparison with such as they; yea, men mock and scorn Him as they please; they nail Him to the cross and murder Him. Therefore He said: “My kingdom is not of this world!”

Why, then, is He called a king? Because He is a king, – a king “just, and having salvation,” as Zechariah says, chapter 9. Therefore, whosoever lives in His kingdom must not expect Him to give money or possessions, to satisfy the body’s wants, or to do the other things which earthly kings are wont to do. No, this King forgives sins; He bestows righteousness; He delivers from everlasting death; He bestows the Holy Spirit and eternal life. These are His gifts to all who hear His voice. This kingdom He has established on earth, but only in the Word and in faith.

We have, therefore, an eternal King omnipotent, Christ Jesus, God's own Son, who rescues us from Satan's power, from sin, from never-ending death. Our King does not deliver from bodily death; for earth is the place for suffering and dying, and He Himself had to suffer here and die. Those who recognize this character of the King and His kingdom bear the cross with resignation. For then they know that our Lord Jesus, the everlasting King, also had to bear the cross, and thus, remembering that the servant cannot fare better than his master, are made willing and ready to suffer. And, besides, they take comfort in the knowledge that, although they must suffer here, there in eternity joy and glory shall be theirs. It is this that makes Christians bold, even in the midst of temptation and death; while they who do not know these things cannot do otherwise in days of adversity than mourn, lament, murmur, show impatience, and, in the end, even despair. For the latter think that if God wished them well, He would not permit so much misery to come upon them, or else would soon help and rescue them. Such thoughts unmistakably prove that Christ is held to be a king of this world. Temporal kings must, according to the duties of their office, protect the bodies, lives and possessions of their subjects and defend them against danger. But Christ, the King of glory, permits body and property, life and all to be in danger.

Do thou learn and firmly believe that these things are so for the reason, simply, that His "Kingdom is not of this world." Thy Christian faith is not to be used by thee on earth as the means for obtaining all things in abundance, or for supplying all thy desires. For behold thy King! How does it fare with Him, the Lord Jesus? With what does He make a display? Did He live a life of ease? Do men regard Him as glorious? We see nothing there except the suffering, mocked, reviled and ignominiously slaughtered One.

True, He does sway a scepter, but only over a very small number, even the testimony of truth, that is, the holy Gospel. By means of this, as said already, He sends the Holy Spirit into the souls of men, forgives their sins, and gives them the hope of everlasting life. But all these things take place only in faith and in the Word; we cannot see them; we cannot touch them; they are realized not by reason, but by hope. However, when earth's kingdom ends and we dwell no longer here, then shall His kingdom and His

glory be revealed to us, yea, we shall live with Him and with Him rule all things in heaven and on earth.

It was in this way that the Lord was recognized on the cross by one of the malefactors, saying, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." He saw Christ suspended on the tree in the same misery, in which he found himself. The malefactor on the left was offended at Christ's helplessness and helped the Jews to rail on Him: Ah! a very fine king, indeed! He concluded that since the dear Lord was so wretched and poor on earth, it would, of course, be useless to expect help from Him. But he on the right knew Him well; he knew Him not as a worldly, but as a spiritual and an eternal King. For this reason he prays that He would remember him in His kingdom when His body should be lifeless there upon the cross. In this way must we also believe in Him, and then shall we find immutable comfort in Christ Jesus.

Now, all Christians need that consolation which always, in all kinds of distress and disappointment comes to them when they hold to Christ's confession before Pilate. It makes them say to themselves: Why shouldst thou weep? Why complain of this or that misfortune? Think what kind of a King thou hast; what says He before Pilate? "My kingdom is not of this world." Wouldst thou have thy kingdom here? No, no; for here it would not last; this is altogether the land of suffering! But in the world to come glory and a joyful life shall surely be found. If they could be found here, they would afford only a short and transient joy, for in this world there is nothing firm nor eternal. But Jesus Christ, my King, is a King in the other world, that is, an everlasting King; postpone thy glorying and thy pleasures, therefore, till thou goest thither, and be content with the treatment thou receivest here. Thy King has not given thee orders to remain here; He will have nothing to do with the world outside of the testimony of truth. – All Christians, I say, need this consolation, but especially they who hold the ministerial office and ply the Word.

For this reason St. Paul urges Timothy with these words, referring to Christ's confession before Pilate, to hold fast to the pure doctrine and not to let it be falsified. The world and the devil cannot bear the Word, and oppose it with all manner of confusion. Every pastor should and must, therefore, cling to the testimony mentioned, and recognize Christ as that King, in whom he finds comfort, and whom he hopes to enjoy, – but not on earth. He

says, “But now is my kingdom not from hence.” And again, “I am a king . . . for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.” Whosoever, therefore, desires to have this King Jesus, let him lay hold on the truth, which is His Word, and know that he shall not on account of His kingdom have greater abundance on earth; yea, let him know that he shall have to bear many a misfortune on account of the Word, even as did Christ, the King, Himself. But when life on earth is over, then shall come the full enjoyment of the Lord Jesus’ kingdom.

The Pope and bishops never knew this consolation. They do not recognize as king one who does no more than bear witness unto the truth, and cry with Pilate: “What is truth?” Had we nothing else we would, no doubt, have to go a begging. Therefore will we have another king, – one who can give us plenty of money, possessions, honor, power and everything; as for this King and His truth, they may in the meanwhile fare as they can. But St. Paul cautions against such folly. And every pious pastor should earnestly heed this admonition, and depend upon it that we shall not be glorified on earth, and that all our glory here shall be to bear witness unto the truth. Earth’s reward for this service shall be, in our case what it was in the Lord Jesus’ case, the gallows and the executioner. Learn to suffer and to hear such things, and let it be your faith and hope, that, although you must suffer here, still this suffering shall, in the other world, be rewarded and made good by the Lord Jesus, the eternal King! But this must suffice for a brief consideration of the testimony before Pilate.

We must now examine the third point also. It is this: Pilate and the Jews greatly undervalue the blood of our dear Lord Jesus, which, finally, falls on them as a crushing and eternal burden.

Matthew mentions in particular that Pilate washed his hands before the multitude, and said: “I am innocent of the blood of this just person.” He thought he had done his whole duty in making several attempts to liberate Christ, and that he could not help it that the Jews resisted him in his efforts. Still he delivered the Lord to be crucified. Just as though his saying “I am innocent” would make him innocent! Had he desired a warning, his wife might have told him how innocent he would be; for she, as related above in the text, had spent a whole night suffering many things in a dream, from which she could judge the severity of the judgment which Pilate would bring upon himself and all belonging to him by consenting to the death of

“that just man.” But so it always is with the blood of the Lord Jesus and with that of His Christians. Herod the elder slew all Bethlehem’s innocent infants. His son slew the holy John the Baptist. Both dared to think themselves benefited by their murder. Neither did Pilate here regard it as much out of the way that he sentenced Christ to die. He thought that his opinion would also be God’s opinion, and that God would, therefore, hold him innocent. But without doubt God’s wrath did not tarry long till it utterly destroyed the house, the tribe, the name of Pilate, and then thrust his body and soul into hell and into the eternal fire. There he discovered how innocent he was of this blood!

But the Jews went about this murder with still greater recklessness. When Pilate said, “See ye to it,” they shamelessly burst out with the cry, “His blood be on us, and on our children,” that is, in case He should be wronged, we are willing that we and our children shall suffer for it. It was easily said, and seemed to have been spoken with impunity. But before forty years had passed they saw their imprecation about to be answered. And then this “blood” began to flow down upon them in such streams that Jerusalem and the whole Jewish kingdom soon were desolate, the people lamentably slain, and all things overthrown. But even this sufficed not; from that time till this, and it is now nearly fifteen hundred years, they have wandered about in misery, nowhere finding a continuing city.

This temporal punishment, so that they have no cities nor government of their own, is truly severe, but it shall come to an end. But this is truly terrible that their hearts are so horribly embittered against Christ, the Son of God. Instead of seeking and expecting forgiveness of sin and eternal life and salvation, as they should, of Christ, their King and God, they abuse and revile Him, thus taking delight in falsehood and error, and diligently seek means of darkening the Scriptures before their own eyes and preventing their understanding it. Therefore, when they fancy that they are calling upon and serving God, they really serve the very devil. Neither does God hear them. And since they desire no freedom from sin through the Son of God, there can be nothing surer to them than that they must die in their sins and be forever ruined. In the 8. chapter of John, Christ tells them this very thing: “If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.”

They did not, at that time, perceive this calamity, and even thought that the sooner Christ could be slain the better it would be for them. Without any

further thought, therefore, they said: If He is wronged, may we and our children be punished! But even as the thirty pieces of silver afforded Judas a joy of only short duration, so also a change soon came upon the Jews. From day to day failure advanced upon all their affairs, until, in the end, they went to utter ruin. This is, therefore, a fit subject for the serious meditation especially of great kings and princes; these should remember what an easy, trifling thing it seemed for Pilate and the Jews to shed innocent blood, and how this finally forced them into the abyss of hell.

When our bishops and their idol, the Pope, have succeeded in seizing a pious, faithful minister and pastor, they hurry him off to the stake or to the gallows, and dream they have done well; they do this, therefore, like Pilate and the Jews, with wantonness. But their success is not made certain yet; alas, such an end as theirs shall be! For it is impossible that God should look long upon such deeds in silence; innocent blood cries so mightily into His ears that He must rise and inflict punishment.

Pilate was thrust so low that now, no doubt, not a single person of his name or tribe remains. The Jews to this day are laboring under the blood of Jesus Christ, and it will finally press them down to hell. The great and powerful emperors and the mighty princes in the Romish and all other kingdoms, and every one else that has ever persecuted Christians,— they all have been lamentably overthrown and slain.

And surely the same fate awaits the enemies of Christ of our day, who act as tyrants and persecute and murder Christians for the Gospel's sake. Let no one fear that punishment shall fail to come! They who meddle with the innocent blood of Christians, though they may be as mighty as the Emperor Augustus, must still go down, together with all their descendants. They may, indeed, be thinking how that we are heretics and that they do right by staying us. So thought Pilate, and especially the Jews, but it availed them nothing. Let every one, therefore, take good care of himself and let alone the blood of Christians! At first it seems a little sin, — a trifle merely; but in the end, everything that is stained with Christians' blood shall be utterly destroyed, as all history testifies.

May Almighty God resist all tyrants, mercifully grant peace unto His Church, graciously keep us by His Word and save us forever. Amen.

**Ninth Passion Sermon. Christ
Led Away To Be Crucified. –
Simon Bears The Cross After
Him. – The Women Who Follow
Bewail And Lament Him.
(Translated by Isensee) Luke
23:26-31.**

And as they led Him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus. And there followed Him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented Him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

Simon's bearing the cross and the women's weeping occurred while Christ was being led from Pilate to the place of execution. Matthew, Mark and Luke alike make mention of Simon, a Cyrenian, to show, no doubt, that what is said of him was no accident, as it might seem, but so ordained by God for a special purpose, viz.: that at the very time when Christ should be

led away to suffer, all Christians might have an example set, from which to learn how they should fare on earth, – that they must bear the cross after the Lord Jesus, like Simon here. This good and pious man, not knowing in what the Jews at Jerusalem were engaged, went into the city according to his need and opportunity, to attend to his business. And now, as the Lord and the two murderers were led toward him, and the Lord, on account of weakness, could carry no further the cross which had been placed on Him, and which, since a strong, full-grown man was to be nailed to it, must have been pretty heavy, the soldiers ran up to good, pious Simon and compelled him to take up the cross or tree, to which Christ was to be nailed, and to bear it after the Lord.

This looks as if it had happened incidentally. But it is, as already said, a picture of all Christians, which God wished to show to His Church just when His dear Son, Jesus Christ, was Himself suffering, so as to check that common offense which is so apt to lead us all astray. For as soon as God comes to us with the cross, attacking our body or property, giving us ill-bred children or sending some other misfortune or calamity, our courage fails us. We then conclude that God does not wish us well, and that if He loved us He would deal more gently with us. We take the fact that He permits us to be troubled, afflicted and tormented as an indication that He is angry with us and refuses to be gracious.

Now, the picture in our text is to operate against offenses of this kind. In the first place, we see the Son of God bearing His cross Himself and finding it so heavy that it nearly throws Him down and that He can scarcely walk. Mark this well! For if such things happen to the green and fruitful tree, about which we shall soon be told, it is easy to infer that better things shall not and can not happen the dry and unfruitful tree. In the second place, we see pious Simon doing the work that others should have done; had he not come near where Christ was compelled to carry His cross, he would never have needed to bear a cross. But here he suffers for the Lord Jesus; because Christ carries the cross, he also must suffer and help to carry it. Remember, it shall never be different with Christians here; they must all submit with Simon and bear the cross after Christ.

Although God may bear with the wicked for a while and permit them to receive everything that their hearts wish and covet, still their punishment shall not be delayed always. They too must suffer here on earth, receiving

now here a kick then there a thrust, and never afterward enjoying uninterrupted success, as the 32. Psalm tells us: “Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about,” and as is glaringly shown by examples.

Severe and violent were the sufferings of ungodly Pharaoh and his Egyptians. And how much misfortune, oppression and grief did not the Jews have to bear in the desert and afterward in the land of Canaan, until, finally, the Assyrian wasted the ten tribes, and, some time after, even Judah’s tribe was flung into the whirlpool of woes and the entire land conquered by the Babylonians! But it is not necessary to cite many instances. Each one need merely think of what he himself has seen and experienced in his own case and in that of others. It is, therefore, impossible that punishment, distress, wretchedness and tribulation should finally foil to follow where God is not feared and where His Word and will are resisted.

But from the case of Simon here we must learn to make a difference between the holy cross and the well-deserved punishment and misery of the wicked. No wonder if the knave fares badly; for he rushes to his doom with open eyes. If the thief would stop his stealing he would, no doubt, remain secure against the gallows and the hangman. As for men and women, if they would refrain from debauchery, they might enjoy wealth, honor and health. But since they do not desist, but continue in sin, God punishes them with poverty, disgrace, disease, or other misfortunes. These wicked ones wish nothing else and nothing better; for, by their sin and impenitent lives they themselves furnish the cause for their misery and distress; they urge God, who would delight in being merciful and in giving them all good things, yea, they compel Him to make His anger burn at once, to heap destruction on them and to stem the tide of sin. Peter therefore says, 1 Pet. 4:15: “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters.” He thus makes this distinction, that not all suffering is to be called a “cross;” for that which the wicked suffer is not their cross, but their punishment and merited reward; while that which Christians suffer, like Simon here, is called and is in reality a “cross,” because it is not merited, but the fault of others. If Simon had not just happened to meet the Lord Jesus, he would have been let alone; but he has to suffer for it that he came where Christ was being led to the crucifixion.

In this way all Christians should suffer and bear the cross; even as Peter says: Not “suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, . . . yet . . . as a Christian,” that is, for the sake of the Lord Jesus and His Word and confession. All Christians acknowledge themselves to be poor sinners, and know that through sin they have deserved all the calamities God sends upon them on earth, and many more. They are, indeed, the only ones who acknowledge their short-comings, weakness and transgressions; for sin’s peculiar punishment is eternal death, and not this or that particular temporal misfortune. Nevertheless, their suffering is not the punishment for sin, but the real and holy “cross.” His being a sinner and his stumbling and falling occasionally, is not the reason why the Christian is hated by the evil adversary and the world. No, both the devil and the world could well tolerate that, and would be satisfied with the Christian as far as that is concerned. But the Christian holds to the Word and has faith; he put his hope in Christ, the Son of God, and is comforted in His death and resurrection; he fears God and tries to live according to His will; he labors hard, by means of his confession, to persuade others to believe and to come to the knowledge of Christ. This it is that neither the devil nor his tender bride, the world, can endure; this it is that makes Satan rage so terribly against all Christians; this it is that makes him always pursue them, afflicting their bodies with disease and sometimes their property with loss by storms, or hail, or fire, as it was the case with Job. (Job 1.) And sometimes he troubles them with great secret torments of conscience, such as melancholy, sadness, fear, trembling, doubts, dread of death, and like fiery darts of the devil, about which the Psalms lament so much. Of this kind was the temptation of Paul which he mentions 2 Cor. 12: “There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me,” etc. And what the world does in this direction is easily seen, especially in times like the present, when poor Christians receive such wretched and horrible treatment.

This is bearing the Lord Jesus’ cross as Simon did. Simon was certainly also a poor sinner, but what is that to these soldiers? It is not for this that they make him suffer, but they make him suffer because Christ, who cannot get along with His cross, is present and needs some one to help Him bear the cross.

Therefore, although thou art a poor sinner, and confessest how thou hast in various ways sinned against God; still, because thou believest in Christ, thy sins are not the chief cause of all thy crosses and afflictions, and thy sins are not that for which the devil and the world punish thee. Nay, it would be their joy and rejoicing if thou wouldst be altogether on their side, and not on that of God and His Word. It is chiefly on account of the Lord Jesus, His Word and thy faith that thou must suffer.

This, that Simon bears the Lord Jesus' cross, is the first thing to be learned here. It is profitable especially for consolation, giving us certainty that we shall realize our hope of help and salvation, and provoking us to prayer. For he who, when he lies under the cross and in misery, thinks only of his being a sinner and deserving such punishment, is, by such thoughts, made too cold and too lazy to pray. For it is the nature of sin always to terrify the heart, to make it fearful and timid, and to deprive it of the consolation and the hope that God will bestow aught that is good. But if we consider the real, chief reason why the devil and the world are such bitter enemies of ours and heap all manner of mischief on us, we shall have to confess that it is not on account of our sins that they are so furious. They would like, and this is their constant aim, to plunge us into all sin and shame, to succeed in which would be their pleasure and satisfaction. They are opposed to us, they seek where they can to do us harm and hate us, especially because we heed the Word of God, confess the Lord Jesus, place our confidence in the goodness and grace of God and desire to live according to His will, in His fear and love, and in faith and obedience. This is the fountain and foundation of their hatred and envy. Mark well, thou must therefore not deny that thou art a poor sinner, and that thou hast by thy sins deserved every calamity. For God punishes also His own for their sins, as Peter says, "Judgment must begin at the house of God." But Satan and the world, so say to thyself, are not angry with me on this account; they would be satisfied with me if I, like a hog in the mire, remained impenitent in my sins. But why, then, do they hate me? Simply because I believe and confess that the Man who here bears the cross is my God and Saviour.

Now, if this is true, what shall we do next? Shall we despair? No, as you prize your soul, no! Firm hope must be ours. And though we are miserable sinners, it is still most sure that the Lord Jesus will not let us perish as long as we suffer for His sake. He can help us mercifully, and He will do so. And

as we suffer and die with Him, so shall we also be exalted with Him into glory and live with Him forever. But let us boldly open our mouth and cry, saying: O Lord, we are, indeed, poor sinners, and by our disobedience have deserved infinitely severer chastisement than we are now bearing; but look, O Lord, at the wicked enemy's intentions. The enemy hates Thee and Thy name, and hates us too because we hold fast to Thee and Thy name, find comfort in Thy Word, and hope for mercy through Thy death and merits. Therefore, dear Lord Jesus Christ, be Thou avenged on them, and help us for Thy name's sake. – Such thoughts make the heart cheerful and give it confidence and boldness to pour itself out in prayer. For this reason the holy Prophets also prayed in this way, constantly pleading the name of God, as David does in the 44. Psalm: “Yea, for Thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter.” Let the preceding, about Simon's being compelled by the soldiers to suffer for the sake of the Lord Jesus by bearing His cross, be said, then, for the special purpose of teaching the distinction between the Christian's cross and the wicked man's punishment for sin.

The second thing to be learned here is that Simon not only bears the cross, but also bears it because he is compelled to do so. For if he would have had his own will in the matter, he would have gone his way and cared very little what was becoming of Christ and His cross. But the soldiers seize him against his will, and compel him to carry the cross.

This subject teaches us also very nicely what really is and what is not a cross. Monks and nuns who are in earnest, lead an austere life and oppress themselves with the most difficult labor. But this is not the cross of Christ which Simon bears. Why? Because they have placed it on themselves from their own free choice and without the command of God. And just so the Anabaptists do. But the proverb, “what is done from choice is done with ease,” might be applied to such suffering; since it is self-imposed, and might be avoided, it cannot hurt very badly. But when one is compelled to bear the cross and does it reluctantly, then it becomes heavy and oppressive. It is this idea that Christ expresses when He says, John 21, to Peter: “When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.” Let

Christians be ever so perfect, flesh and blood cannot help but shudder at, fear and shun the cross.

For this reason this man is called Simon or Simeon, which, in his language, means one who takes advice and obeys. For that is true obedience which, though it prefers to be exempt from this or that suffering, still yields to it willingly, following and letting itself be led, simply because it sees that God desires it so. All true Christians can be called by this name Simon. For although their flesh and blood would like to rest and be excused from pain, they still obey, heed the Word, are submissive to to the will of God, and help the Lord Jesus bear His cross.

The third thing to be learned here is to distinguish between Simon and the Lord Jesus. Simon bears the cross after the Lord Jesus as far as the place of execution and then goes away; while Christ allows Himself to be nailed to the cross and dies on it. This is the true difference between the suffering of Christ and our suffering. Our suffering does not earn the forgiveness of sins. This is accomplished alone by the sufferings of our Lord. Jesus. He alone is the true Sacrifice and Lamb of God which pays and atones for the sins of all the world and, for this reason, hangs upon the cross. But Simon merely carries the cross; that is, our bearing the cross does nothing more with the old Adam than molest him, and nothing more with sin than oppose it. But it is the work and merit of our Lord Jesus alone that forgives our sins.

Thus, beloved, you perceive that this Simon is a pattern for all Christians, for they must bear the cross of the Lord Jesus; and that it is not, however, on account of this bearing that their sins are forgiven. The bearing of the cross serves to restrain the old Adam, lest he become too wild. But when the cross is to be the means of the forgiveness of sins, it will not do for Simon to bear it, but then Christ must hang and die on it. This is the reason why Simon is set free. By Christ's death we are set free from death and receive eternal life, as this is clearly pointed out in that part of our text which we are about to treat.

St. Luke tells us that as the Lord was led out of Jerusalem, some women followed, bewailing and lamenting Him. The Lord turned to them and told them not to weep for Him, but for themselves and for their children, because the time was coming when the woman without child would be

called blessed, and when, as Hosea says, men would desire the mountains to fall upon and cover them. But the reason of such calamity and woe was, that since Christ, the green tree, was so badly treated, they, the dry and barren tree, would be treated still worse.

Although these things referred especially to the Jews of that day, they still show us how to make proper use of our Lord Jesus' sufferings; first, by revealing sin as a terrible burden, – the Son of God Himself being compelled to die on account of our sin; and then, by consoling us against sin by means of Christ's sufferings, – the Son of God having rendered satisfaction and atoned for sin upon the cross.

Notice, first, the difference which the Lord makes between Himself and the Jews, for on this difference a great deal depends. Himself He compares to a young tree, so beautiful and fruitful that it should be bought for a garden, and by no means cut down and cast into the fire. Nevertheless, the latter is done. God lets Him be cut down, that is, He lets Him now be led out to the cross, where He is to be slain as the greatest malefactor, notwithstanding that He is such a fine, sappy, beautiful and fruitful tree. He is without all sin and walks before God in perfect obedience, and all things He says and does are purely noble and precious fruits, every one of which is a joy to God and a blessing to us. In short, we find nothing about the Lord Jesus that is not grace, life and salvation. The Jews on the other hand, He compares to an old, barren, dry and rotten tree, which is altogether out of place in the garden, and only fit to be felled and burned. For they did not heed God's Word. John's preaching brought no fruit; they said John had a devil. Christ, the Son of God, Himself and His Apostles preached. Neither did they pay any attention to Him, but called Him a winebibber, said He had a devil, and hated and envied Him so bitterly that they had no peace until they had brought Him from life to death. Nevertheless, since they had Moses, the law, and the external worship of God in the temple at Jerusalem, they dared to think that they were God's people, that they were living saints, indeed, and that they rested in God's bosom. Now, it is easy to imagine, if the Son of God, who is a fine, fruitful tree, is visited by so severe a judgment of God, how infinitely severe shall be the fate of the terribly great sinners, the dry trees. It was the Lord's desire that the Jews should understand this now and not continue in their sin; that, by seeing Him, who, though innocent, was crucified and killed, they might learn to fear the wrath

of God and to flee from it by true repentance. Little, however, did this wanting avail. The dry tree could yield no fruit, and so was cast into the fire. History shows this, where it tells us that about forty years after Christ's death a most terrible judgment came upon the Jews for their sin, the Romans desolating their whole land. For themselves, therefore, even as the Lord here counsels and exhorts them to do, and not for Christ, should they have wept, acknowledging their sins and repenting. We too, however, should take this advice to heart. For we all must confess that we have many and great sins and, therefore, are dry and unfruitful trees,— trees which do not and can not yield anything good. What, then, shall we do? Nothing except weep and cry to God for pardon, and earnestly resist and curb our evil, sinful nature and inordinate desires. For we are admonished here, that since the fruitful tree receives such shameful treatment, God permitting His dear Son to suffer so severely, we should not feel secure, nor laugh, nor skip carelessly along, like the world, which neither hears nor knows this warning of the Lord. But we should weep, we should discern our sins, we should heartily lament that we have been so corrupted by sin and that we have become unfruitful trees; we should fear the wrath of God on this account and pray for mercy and forgiveness.

The first thing for us specially to learn from the sufferings of Christ is to fear God and His anger on account of our sins, and not to give the reins to sin. This we must do for ourselves, for we are a dry, unfruitful tree, which is fit only for the fire.

But the Lord teaches us still another thing here. We should weep for ourselves and for our children; but for Him we should not weep, but laugh, rejoice and be of good cheer. For why does He suffer? He is a genuine, good and fruitful tree, and has not deserved such a cruel fate, but bears it for our sin's sake. And as He now proceeds to the cross it is His only aim to perform the work of His priestly office, and not only to pray for sinners, but also to sacrifice His body and His life upon the altar of the cross for them, so that this offering may reconcile God, liberate poor sinners from His wrath, and make them heirs of everlasting life. The Lord, therefore, does not want us to think of His sufferings as of something for which we should weep. He wants us to rejoice, to glorify God, to thank Him for His mercy, to praise, to extol and to confess Him, because His going to the cross has

brought to us the grace of God, freed us from sin and death, and made us God's dear children.

But the first of these lessons goes down as hard with us as the second, and the second as hard as the first. We prefer the ways of the world to the warning and advice of the Lord Jesus. We should weep for ourselves, because sin has polluted us so, and because so terrible a judgment awaits us. But where is the man to be found who weeps? The deeper men sink into the slime of sin, the more secure and joyful they grow. Man deems his joy, glory and life perfect, as we have said several times before, when he has numerous occasions for sinning. No sum of money can satiate the miser's maw. The more advantage the greedy man can take and the freer access to gain he has, the happier he becomes, and he verily imagines that he has done his work well. Just so it is with other sins, such as. anger, lewdness, envy, pride. Who cares for them? Who weeps for them? They are loved by every one and every one yields to them.

How the Jews succeeded with such work we clearly see. It behooves us, therefore, to repent and, as the Lord now so faithfully exhorts when He is about to die, to be concerned and grieved for ourselves. And it is certain, once for all, that our sins shall be punished with eternal death unless we are freed from them.

Even as we are disobedient with reference to the first lesson, for no one weeps and none lament their sins; so do we disobey in regard to the second, for no one wishes heartily to rejoice over the dear Lord Jesus. Money, possessions, honor and the like, mean and little though they be, rejoice the heart; while that which is exclusively grace and life and salvation finds the heart almost chilled and dead, and void of all longing and desire and heartfelt eagerness to possess this treasure.

These lessons, when attention is paid merely to their words, are, indeed, easily and quickly learned; but when, on the other hand, they are to be mastered in their relation to our heart and sinful nature, the task is most difficult and even impossible. Our determination to invert these lessons is hereditary. Instead of weeping for our sins, we laugh about them. Instead of laughing and exulting with all our heart that Christ has died for us, we weep. Now, we either regard this rejoicing on account of Jesus as not superior to the more popular joys of the world; or else sin and the wrath of

God have seized our souls and banished from them the desire and the ability to be comforted. Christ's. "Weep not for me" hardly penetrates the heart. We weep and lament and despair as though Christ had not died, not paid for our sins, not averted God's anger, and not delivered us from death.

Before either lesson can be learned, therefore prayer is necessary. We must pray, first, that God, by His Holy Spirit, would move our hearts, disgust us with and dissuade us from sin, and shield us from false security. We must pray, again, that He would kindle in our souls the flame of consolation against sin, and seal there the confidence in the sacrifice and satisfaction of Christ Jesus; so that we may truly worship God, like poor sinners fear Him, abide in repentance and trust in His goodness with all our heart; for He does not wish us harm, seeing that for the forgiveness of our sins He delivered His Only Begotten into death, even the death of the cross.

May our dear Lord Jesus grant us this. Amen.

Tenth Passion Sermon. Christ Nailed to the Cross. – His Deeds, Sufferings and Words on the Cross. (Translated by Isensee) Matt 27:33-56.

And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, they gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink. And they crucified Him, and parted His garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched Him there; and set up over His head His accusation written, This is Jesus the King of the Jews. Then were there two thieves crucified with Him; one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* that is to say, My God, my God, why hast

Thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save Him. Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God. And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto Him: among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.

Each of the four Evangelists makes a record of the things that occurred on the cross. Still, sometimes one of them mentions a thing that the rest of them omit. Before treating, therefore, on the true doctrine taught in our text, we propose to recite the history of the cross in its details as furnished by all four Evangelists.

When the soldiers had brought the Lord Jesus to Golgotha, the place for executing public malefactors, "they gave Him," as Matthew relates, "vinegar to drink mingled with gall." This gall was not the gall of a live beast, but a compound of all sorts of bitter herbs. This drink, as some suppose, was given to dying criminals, to hasten their departure. But the Lord would not drink of it, for He had willingly yielded to this death. The word gall is used in this sense in Deut. 29, Ps. 69, Jer. 8, and in other places. Immediately after this, the soldiers nailed Him to the cross and two malefactors with Him, one on His right and one on His left. The Lord Jesus, however, as the true priest who must now attend to His priestly office, prayed for those who crucified Him and for all poor sinners, saying: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." We shall have occasion to see the fruit of this prayer when we come to speak of the malefactor on the right of Christ; for to him it was that Gospel and sermon,

from which he learned to know Christ as the Son of God, that He hanged upon the cross as the atonement for the sins of the whole world, and that after His bodily death He would live and reign with God, His Father, in eternity.

The Evangelists announce that Pilate placed the superscription, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,” written in three languages, over the head of the Lord Jesus. It was customary to do this, so that every one might know why people were executed, and take warning. The superscription over the head of the Lord Jesus was to serve the special purpose of admonishing the Jews, even while He was hanging miserably on the cross, not to be offended in Him, but to take Him for their King. But it was in vain! The title made them so indignant that they accosted Pilate thus: “Write not, The King of the Jews; but that He said, I am the King of the Jews.” But Pilate was much displeased with them and would not alter the superscription, which remains an eternal testimony against the Jews, that they could not rest until they had crucified their King.

Hereupon the soldiers, four in number, took the Lord Jesus’ garments, separating them into four parts. His coat, however, which was without seam, being woven, they did not rend, but cast lots for it. And John says that this had been prophesied in the Scriptures. He would have us understand by this that the taking of the Lord’s garments was no accident, but done by God’s special counsel, that it might serve the Church as an emblem; for it shows, first, that the world is not satisfied even when it has put Christians to death, but takes what little property Christians may have and plunders them. This we can see in our old histories, where Julian and other blood-hounds and tyrants drove poor Christians away from their possessions and took from them what they had. We see it not there only, but we have living instances of tyrants and bishops who are well enough pleased when their subjects, contrary to their command, eat meat, hear Lutheran (as they call them) sermons, receive both bread and wine in the Sacrament, and the like; for then they have plausible reasons to oppress their subjects, to sell or trespass upon their property, or to tax them as they please. But we can also see how much richer such money makes them. Money thus unrighteously extorted devours all they have, so that afterward they are neither blest nor prosperous.

The soldiers' casting lots upon the vesture of the Lord can, no doubt, be applied to sects and heretics. The Holy Scriptures is the coat which our Lord Jesus puts on, and in which He can be seen and found. This coat is woven throughout, and all its threads are so interlocked that it cannot be cut nor divided. But the soldiers who crucify Christ, that is, heretics and sects, interest themselves in this coat. Their chief fault is that they want the whole coat, that is, that they try to convince every one that all Scripture harmonizes with them and their opinions. The Sacramentarians of our day serve as an illustration. They regard the words, "This is my body," "This is my blood," as insignificant, saying that they are only a single passage, while the Bible, as they boast, is full of passages which prove Christ to be no longer on earth, but in heaven.

The manner of all sects is to adopt a special opinion without consulting the Word; this opinion then hangs continually before their eyes, like blue glasses, and everything they see is blue, that is, according to their own opinion. But they are knaves, as St. Paul calls them, Eph. 4, where he admonishes us to be no more "carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." The Greek word here translated "sleight" is *kybia*, which means, in English, playing at dice, or trickery. Now, as the knave masters the die so that it must fall to suit him, so sects and fanatics master the Word. Every one wants the whole of it, and makes use of the die. But let us proceed with the history.

As the Lord was hanging on the cross He saw His mother and His mother's sister and John with them, and "He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy Son! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother!"

After this, men of every station began the most heartless scoffing. The chief priests, scribes and elders, as Matthew writes, said, "He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He be Christ, the chosen of God." With such pointed, poisonous words they wished not only to insult the Lord, but also to alienate from Him the people, so that they would not respect Him, so that they would slight and despise all the miracles they had seen and all the sermons they had heard, and so that they would regard Him as a blasphemer. The soldiers, who as Gentiles cared not about God, mocked Him in a different way, giving Him vinegar to drink, "and saying, If Thou be the King of the Jews, save Thyself."

Finally, even one of the malefactors “railed on Him, saying, If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us.” But the other rebuked him for this, saying: And dost even thou not fear God? There thou hangest and in less than an hour or two all will be over with thee. Thou hast all thy life been a scoundrel, like myself, and hast well deserved this punishment. Is it not high time to think of thy salvation and to leave such foolish words unspoken? After giving this reproof he turned to the Lord and said, “Remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.” And Jesus answered, “Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

In the mean time came deep darkness, most unnatural and terrible. The agony of death pressed from the Lord the cry: “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” The Jews well enough understood the meaning of this cry; still their bitterness and their fierceness urged them to pervert Christ’s word and say: “This man calleth for Elias. Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to gave Him!”

“Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.” Then the soldiers took a sponge filled “with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to His mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished.” By these words He meant to say: The world and the devil have now done all that lies in their power, and therefore I have now done all that the redemption of mankind demands, and all that the Prophets have foretold in Holy “Writ; the work is done! Then He”cried with a loud voice, Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit; and having said thus, He gave up the ghost.”

Immediately after, “the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom,” as a testimony that the proper offering had been made to God at last, and that now the law and its sacrifices, which were merely a type of the sacrifice just made, were forever abrogated. The temple was so constructed that the people stood to hear the Word of God and to sing and pray in the apartment nearest the entrance. This was separated from another apartment, which was similar to the chancels in some of our churches, into which were admitted only the priests, who there offered sacrifices and did the other things belonging to the service of God, and which, because none except the holy priests dared enter there, was called the holy place. Beyond this was still another apartment, called the holy of holies in which stood the

mercy-seat. This was separated from the holy place by means of a veil, beyond which no one was allowed to go except the high priest, and he only once every year, when he offered for his sins and for the sins of all the people. It is this veil that the Evangelists tell us was rent. They mention this to testify to us that God's services, as they were conducted in the holy of holies, are ended and abolished, and this because the highest priest, God's Son, has offered now unto God, His Father, for the sins of the whole world, not the blood of goats and calves, but His own body and blood.

This rending of the veil took place while the earth quaked so violently that the rocks rent and that the graves of numerous saints were opened. Out of these graves, after the resurrection of Christ, arose many bodies of the saints, who appeared unto many in Jerusalem, who preached concerning the Lord Jesus and who testified that He was Christ, the true Messiah. These ascended to heaven with the Lord Jesus to live there forever, like Enoch and Elias, whom God took into heaven alive, the former before the flood and the latter three thousand years after the creation of the world. God desired to preserve to His Church in every age a sure testimony of the resurrection from the dead. The number was greater, however, in the case before us than it had ever been in any other case.

Now when the centurion, who had to remain at the cross, and others, saw the earthquake and the other unusual "things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God." "And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned."

All this, according to the Evangelists, took place at the cross before Christ expired. But we cannot consider the whole of it in one sermon. For the present, therefore, we shall confine ourselves to two points. First, why the Evangelists quote more Scripture when they give the history of the passion than on any other subject. Secondly, why God destined His Son to die upon the cross.

The Evangelists cite so many Scripture passages for every part of the history of Christ's sufferings, in order to combat the offense occasioned at sight of these sufferings, which must have sorely tried the disciples in particular. Not only the unbelieving Jews, but even the disciples of Jesus were offended at Christ's dying such a miserable and ignominious death.

Both the Jews and the disciples thought that if this were Christ He would surely build up again the poor, oppressed and ruined kingdom. Why, even after Christ's resurrection the disciples continued to think in this way, for they lamented that the Lord was about to ascend to heaven and depart from the earth, and at the mount of Olives they asked Him, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

When the Lord had now fallen into the hands of His enemies and had suffered Himself to be slain on the cross, all the hopes which the disciples had entertained for His glory vanished. The two disciples who went to Emmaus freely confessed this, saying: "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel," as if they would say: It is all over now; we hoped for things different from those which we have realized. The Jews were offended still more seriously; for, because the Lord was dying so shamefully and would not save Himself, they regarded Him, in spite of His miracles and sermons, as an impostor, and tauntingly demanded that He should come down from the cross if He were the Son of God, so that they might believe in Him. The Jews hated Jesus, the disciples loved Him; the Jews rejoiced in His misfortune, the disciples were saddened and discouraged by it. Notwithstanding that they were thus differently disposed toward Christ, they all, both disciples and Jews, thought that it was all over with Him now and that He was not the true Messiah.

But how must we account for this opinion and for such offense? Simply thus: they left the Scriptures out of sight and had not diligently studied the Prophets. For it is written in the Prophets, Isa. 53, that the Messiah must suffer and die. The Scriptures, Isa. 53, declare that He should be "numbered with the transgressors." In the 41, Ps. and in the 11. chap, of Zech. we are told that His "own familiar friend" should betray Him and sell Him for "thirty pieces of silver." The 22. Ps. plainly tells us that the soldiers should part His garments among them, and cast lots upon His vesture, while the 69. declares that when He shall thirst in His agony upon the cross they shall give Him vinegar to drink. It had been prophesied that there should not a bone of Him be broken and that a spear should pierce His side, Ex. 12, Zech. 12, etc. Now, if the disciples and the Jews had carefully studied the writings of the Prophets, instead of finding cause for offense in Christ's sufferings and scandalous death, they would have found comfort therein. If they had studied the Scriptures, the fact that it came to pass just as the Holy

Spirit, who cannot lie nor err, through the Prophets and in the Psalms, had predicted concerning Christ, would have led them to the firm conclusion that this was the Messiah indeed. But they gave no heed to the Scriptures, and therefore could not resist the offense which, like a flood, swept them away, so that they entirely lost Christ.

The Apostles personally experienced the disadvantage of departing from the Scriptures and not following them, and therefore continually quote the Scriptures as they write the history of the passion. By so doing they would say: It seems ridiculous that the crucified Jesus, who hangs there so miserably upon the cross, and who was treated so unmercifully and with such excessive wantonness by the soldiers, should be the Son of God and the true Messiah. But let us not be offended in Him! If we notice what the Holy Spirit had predicted long before through the Prophets concerning the Messiah, we shall find that this Jesus is the true Messiah, and that He bore what had been appointed for the Messiah to bear. It is most certainly true that if we do not hold to the Word we shall not be able to defend ourselves against the least offense. We are lost unless we take refuge in the Word.

Every one should, for this reason, flee, as if the devil himself were in pursuit, from sects and fanatics, like the Pope, the Sacramentarians and others, who try to substitute human notions for the written Word. If we yield to such as these, we step, as it were, from the rock into the quicksand, where, the more we try to gain a foothold, the more we sink, and where it is impossible to save ourselves. God's Word alone is the true and enduring rock that affords a sure foundation. Let him, therefore, who would walk in the right way, see that he has God's Word. When Christ says, "This is my body," "this is my blood," let him believe and not follow the deceivers who say, It is mere bread, it is mere wine. When Christ says, "He that believeth on me shall never see death," let him believe it and not obey the Pope, who points him to the sacrifice of the mass, to the intercession of saints and to good works. Then he may be sure that he is right, and that he has escaped the offence.

We now propose briefly to consider also the second point, viz.: why it was decreed in God's especial counsel that God's Son, our Lord and Saviour, should die just as He did; for the Jews held the death upon the cross as the most offensive and disgraceful, and as far more detestable than we hold the death upon the gallows or the wheel. We find the reason for this

written Deut. 21: “And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.”

Now, it is indifferent whether God pronounces this severe judgment upon those hanged in view of the future calamity that His Son Himself should be thus slain, or in view of the past calamity that disobedient man fell in Paradise and ate of the forbidden fruit. The chief and most important consideration here is, that we should learn and remember well that God calls all those accursed who die on the tree. For from this it immediately follows that, since Christ also died on a tree, He too became a curse and was called accursed. Hence the devil and the world took particular delight in bringing upon Him that very death which God Himself had called accursed. Paul, however, teaches us how we must understand this passage in Deut., and whether its contents ought to be a subject for joy or for offense; for in speaking of it he says, Gal. 3:

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree; that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

We should, by all means, consider this passage carefully. Paul very nicely brings the two little words, “curse” and “blessing,” side by side, and leads us back to the promise made to Abraham when God said, “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” For it follows that, if in Abraham’s seed all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, all the nations of the earth must have been under the curse; else they would not have needed a promise of blessing. Again, this seed, in which the blessing was to come, must have been that only blessed seed, with which God is not wroth, but which He accompanies with pure grace and blessing. It is plain, however, who this seed of Abraham is; namely, Jesus Christ, born of the virgin Mary, the Only Begotten of the Father, and the only one full of grace and truth. All others, counting from Adam to the very last man, are not children of grace by nature, but God is angry with them and hostile to them, and they are not blessed, but cursed. And why? Because they all are sinners.

But behold the result! The blessed seed of Abraham is nailed to that tree, or cross, to which God refers when He says, “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree;” and it is therefore no longer called the blessed seed, but the accursed. Paul comes out boldly with this, saying, Christ was “made a curse.” Let us hear the reason for this.

It is we who, on account of our sins, are a curse, and under the wrath of God. Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is full of grace and truth. How, then, does He come to be nailed to the tree? Why does He thrust Himself under the wrath of God? It was for our sake, Paul tells us; “He was made a curse for us;” He desired to bear God’s wrath and atone for our sins, that we might be made blessed, that is, receive the Holy Spirit, be freed from sin, and become the children of God.

This may be illustrated by the case of a poor beggar who has many debts, but is unable to pay them; another man, who is able to pay these debts, comes to his assistance, becomes his surety, thus making himself a debtor, and pays the poor man’s debts.

Paul expresses this very nicely, Rom. 8: “The law could not” deliver us from sin and death, and so God Himself helped us. He sent “His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh,” that is, His Son became man, assuming our flesh and blood. And God “for sin, condemned sin in the flesh,” that is, God has made us free from sin through His only begotten Son, who became a sin-offering and had to atone for sin, thus bringing the blessing of Abraham upon us who were under the curse. In 2 Cor. 5, Paul himself interprets this latter: God “hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

Christ, therefore, became both “a curse,” and afterward also “sin,” that is, a sin-offering, upon which rest the sins of all men, and hence also the wrath of God and a miserable death. Since these things rest upon this offering, we are relieved, for they rest on us no longer. This is the reason why John the Baptist calls Him a Lamb, meaning a sheep for the slaughter, a Sacrifice, appointed by God to take away the sins of the whole world. And the Lord Himself says, John 12: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” And again, John 3: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,”

Paul says that he did not know anything and was “determined not to know anything,” “save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” Christ was crucified so that He might sanctify, deliver and justify us, who, had we been left to ourselves, would have eternally remained and perished under sin and death, and under the tyranny of Satan.

And should we now be offended at the cross? Was it, after all, an ignominious death? We should heartily thank God that His Son hangs upon the cross, bearing the curse under which we should still be on account of our sins. There He hangs as one condemned, and as one whom God hates and visits now with shame and want and agony. This is so, Paul says, for thy sake and for my sake, that the blessing might come on us. For if the curse had continued to rest on us, we would never have received the blessing. But lo, the blessed Seed draws near and takes the curse, which rests on us, upon Himself, and the blessing, which rests on Him, He gives to us. Since He would and should become a curse for us, no other death except this death on the cross was suitable, for this is the death which God’s Word had declared accursed.

Let us, then, thoroughly learn here to judge, not according to what the eye perceives, but according to what the Word of God declares. According to appearances the Lord Jesus’ death is a shameful death and, as God Himself calls it, an accursed death; and the tree on which He dies, an execrable tree, – a cursed cross, and this because all our sins hang on it. For sin and the curse, or God’s anger, and every misfortune, – all these belong together. Therefore Isaiah says: “Many were astonished at Thee; His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.” Again: “When we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.” This is the way these things appear, and it is impossible for human reason to see them in a different light, because God calls every one accursed who dies on a tree. The cross is cursed; He who hangs on it is cursed; the cause of His hanging there is also cursed, for sin demands the curse; and the greater the number of sins that lie on the Lord Jesus, the greater also the curse.

But let us look a little further and find what follows from this that Christ, the blessed Seed, dies such an accursed death and becomes a curse for us

Himself. Paul, in very appropriate words, states this as the result: “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles,” and that thus “we might receive the Holy Spirit.” This we find to be altogether different from that which we can see with the bodily eye. This disgraceful death which God has cursed is an offense to the eye, but to us it is a blessed death, for it takes the curse away from us and brings God’s blessing to us. The tree which in itself is an accursed tree, is for us a blissful tree. It is that precious altar, upon which God’s Son offers Himself to God, His Father, for our sins. It is that glorious altar, at which He appears as the true and eternal priest. For He is brought to the tree, and He makes it a blessed altar, that we might be released from sin, and receive God’s grace and be God’s children.

No wonder, then, that the old teachers entertained such excellent thoughts about the cross and the accursed tree. There in Paradise, they say, a beautiful tree occasioned our falling into sin and death; here, however, an old, dry, yes accursed tree occasioned our deliverance from sin and our receiving everlasting life. Here hangs God’s Son with arms extended as a testimony that He will cast no one out, but gladly receive every one and draw all unto Him, as He says He will, John 12. His head is lifted toward heaven, pointing out to us the way of life eternal. His feet reach toward the ground where they bruise the head of Satan, that old serpent creeping on the earth, forcing from him all his power. That power over us which Satan received because of our sins he surely loses now, in virtue of the dear Lord Jesus’ hanging on the cross, where He atones for our sins with His death and becomes a curse in our stead.

Therefore, let us here learn to acknowledge and to praise our merciful heavenly Father’s gracious will toward us. For He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up to die, yea, to die upon the cross, and suffered Him to be made a curse; so that we might obtain the blessing, be set free from sin, receive the Holy Spirit, and through Him become God’s children and be eternally saved.

God grant this to us all. Amen.

Eleventh Passion Sermon. Christ's Prayer On The Cross. – The Malefactor On The Right. (Translated by Isensee) Luke 23:32-43.

And there were also two others, malefactors, led with Him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted His raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided Him, saying, He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming to Him, and offering Him vinegar, and saying, If Thou be the King of the Jews, save Thyself. And a superscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, This is the King of the Jews. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us. But the other answering, rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? and we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.

The holy Evangelist here mentions two things that are very consolatory. Therefore, although the other Evangelists have omitted them in their record

of Christ's sufferings, we shall treat of them here, so that this record may be before us in its completeness. The first of these things is, that Christ, immediately after the cross, to which He had been nailed, was erected, began to pray, saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." The other thing we wish to notice is, that the malefactor on the right of Christ, hearing this prayer, learned from it that Jesus was the Son of God and the very Christ, and therefore desired to be remembered by Him when He should have come into His kingdom.

Let us now consider these two things, for they are full of consolation and we can never sufficiently meditate upon them nor explain them. And, besides all this, it is necessary for us, not only to behold the works and sufferings of this Man, but also most carefully to heed the words proclaimed by Him; for these declare the reason of His deeds and sufferings, and their consequence.

It is of the greatest importance, however, to distinguish between the suffering of our Lord Jesus and that of all other men. This distinction is momentous, not only because Jesus Christ is eternal God, who created heaven and earth and all things, but also because His suffering had a peculiar cause, and because the benefit, or fruit, of His suffering is such that it could not have been produced by the suffering of any other man, or of an angel, or of any creature. He suffered, as you lately heard, not for Himself, but for us, that we might be delivered from sin and death. This we also learn from the words He here speaks in our text, which words it behooves every Christian to observe and to entwine in his soul as his most precious treasure and comfort.

The words He spoke upon the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," clearly show, that He was attending to His true priestly office even while suspended in the air upon the cross; and that He was fulfilling the work which brought Him to earth, not only with His suffering, in that He sacrificed Himself, but also with prayer, both sacrifice and prayer belonging to the office of the priest. Christ tells us that the sacrifice consisted chiefly in His sanctifying Himself for our sakes, so that we "also might be sanctified through the truth," John 17; or, according to John 10, in His laying down His "life for the sheep." There are many more passages of this kind, all of which show that His sufferings were not to be for Himself, but for us. The zeal with which He here performed this work

and offered this sacrifice was such that He even prayed that the Father would forgive those who crucified Him, – that He would pardon and not punish their sin. He prayed thus that all might know why He was brought to the cross, and that they might receive comfort from this knowledge.

This prayer, therefore, should teach us, first of all, that our dear Lord Jesus is a priest, and that He fulfilled the duties of His priestly office there upon the cross. To pray for sinners is, indeed, one of the proper employments of the priesthood. Now, Aaron, serving under the law, was invested with peculiar priestly apparel made for glory and for beauty. But would we know with what priestly robes Christ was clad and what the altar was at which He served, we need merely look at the cross. There we see Him entirely naked, full of wounds and void of every trace of sacerdotal splendor. Still He attended to His priestly duties most perfectly and carefully, even praying for His foes. Let us not be offended at His unpriestly appearance, for the work of this Priest has a significance entirely different from that of Moses' priests. This difference we learn even from the superscription written over Him, which declares Him to be "The King of the Jews," the correctness of which title He had Himself publicly and clearly confessed before Pilate.

Neither does this title harmonize with His appearance. Instead of wearing a scarlet robe, His body is covered with blood and wounds and bruises. Instead of a golden crown. He wears a crown of thorns. There upon the cross we see a Priest and King, of whom the world is ashamed, whom the world despises, and whom it regards as neither King nor Priest. This is just what Isaiah says: "When we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not." This Priest offers us His own body and blood upon the cross in a place that was dishonored, desecrated, yea, accursed. This shall ever be our dearest, loveliest and most graceful garment, no matter how it is regarded by the world and the natural eye. Bulls, heifers and calves were sacrificed in the temple upon a consecrated altar, but Christ sacrifices Himself upon an altar that was not consecrated. Gallows and places of execution are to this day horrid and dishonorable, and Moses writes: "He that is hanged is accursed of God." Now, the world thinks it disgraceful and dishonorable that this Priest was not permitted to

bring His offering even to the place where heifers and calves were sacrificed. But this was for us and for our good, that we might learn that He has brought a fully satisfactory offering for our sins, as it was stated already in the preceding sermon. Since our sins could not be atoned for and removed by any other than this Priest who is the eternal Son of God, it is our fault that He could not have a more honorable altar and a more precious garment. This is no hindrance, however, to the discharge of His office. He not only does offer His body and blood, but also prays for poor, ignorant sinners.

We should, therefore, be heartily comforted because of this Priest and His office. Even as He suffers not alone for those who were present at His crucifixion, took hold of Him and nailed Him to the cross, so neither does He pray for them alone, but also for us, otherwise the prayer of Christ would receive too limited an interpretation. Those present then were merely our servants and ministers. Had it not been my sin and thy sin that nailed the Lord Jesus to the cross, these men would surely not have been able to molest Him.

He now comes forward as the true High Priest and Lamb of God, by the sacrifice of Himself to atone for the sins of all the world and to conquer death for men, and this is the only reason why the Jews and Gentiles receive power to harm Him. Thus we see that when He prays for those who crucify Him, He prays for us and all men, who by our sins had furnished the cause for His crucifixion and death. For this reason we should not regard the gallows, or the cross, on which Christ suffered, as anything else than that altar, upon which He offers up His life and at which He discharges the priestly duty of prayer, to the end that we might be free from sin and everlasting death. For whoever takes sin away, takes away death also, because when sin is gone then death has lost its power, and therefore hell also.

Christ, our only and eternal High Priest, is the One who has done this for us on the cross. He has reconciled us to God, without the intervention of our works, by His own sufferings, having been made a curse for us, having died upon the cross for our sins, and having finally prayed for sinners. Let us, therefore, not forget heartily to thank Him for this.

True, even popery preaches on this theme. But, although the text tells us so clearly and the history relates to us so plainly that Christ sacrificed Himself upon the cross for our benefit, and that He suffered in our stead, popery uses many words to make the populace believe that men must be their own priests, that they themselves must sacrifice for sin, and that their own works must merit life eternal. Therefore, when we now teach, and God be praised that we do teach it, that the Evangelists plainly write that Christ, the true and eternal High Priest, has delivered us from death and obtained everlasting life for us by the sacrifice of Himself, the blind and wretched hirelings of the Pope curse and condemn the divine truth and call it scandalous heresy. Terrible and woeful anger, blindness and punishment has surely been poured out upon the ungrateful world in that the blasphemers, these Papists, themselves confess and preach that Christ offered Himself on the cross for us, and, at the same time, rage against us and shed innocent blood because we teach this doctrine and point the people to this sure and everlasting consolation. Truly, this is a realization of Isaiah's denunciation against the despisers of God's Word: "Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not," and receive ye a hardened and foolish heart. If this were not the case it would be inexplicable why they so lightly esteem this Sacrifice and place all their confidence in their own, man-appointed works, such as cities, garments and food, "which all," Paul says, "are to perish with the using." O, why will men not take the consolation offered here, viz., that Christ sacrificed His body and His life and, praying for us, said: Father, here am I, a Mediator between Thee and poor sinners; I die for them; I give myself for them; be gracious unto them.

Notwithstanding that our adversaries themselves read, confess and preach this, they will continue to yell and foam at it and to condemn us as heretics. Well, this is the visitation of God's dreadful wrath upon them. May the Lord in mercy shield us against such visitation. But should He ever suffer us to fall, I pray that He would let us fall into a sin which we may feel and acknowledge, and not into one that bids direct defiance to His grace and that is looked upon as holiness, whose outward features it assumes.

Let us, therefore, open our hearts and behold Christ, our High Priest, in His proper priestly garment and at His proper priestly work. The eye does not see Him arrayed in beauty or in wealth, but finds Him ignominiously

hanging there in misery and wretchedness. But if we look into His heart we shall discover ornaments so bright and treasures so rich that we can never thank Him for them sufficiently. He is adorned, in the first place, with that most sincere obedience in which He glorifies His Father by permitting Himself to be Spit upon, scourged and tortured. In this life we cannot fully comprehend the glory of this ornament; still we can understand enough of it to know that all pearls and purple and gold are nothing beside it. His other ornament is that great love He has for us which makes Him care so little about His life and His sufferings, almost forgetting them in the heart-felt interest He takes in our condition and in our need, and praying for us rather than for Himself. We cannot sufficiently understand such love as this; for in the heart of the Lord there is burning such a flame of love for us, that He does not seem to see or to feel His own most severe suffering, torture and disgrace, but only considers and perceives and cares for thy and my misery, distress and affliction.

We cannot help acknowledging that the love of the Lord, who is so concerned about us that He entirely overlooks His own danger, injury and pain, is indeed a mighty, burning love. Father and mother, when their dear child is in danger or want, rush through the fire to save it, caring not for their own safety, but only for that of their child. The love of our Lord Jesus is also such that He passes through affliction as through a fire, to grasp us with the hand of mercy and affection. Now, this is the fitting garment with which our eternal High Priest is arrayed. This is not an outer vestment for the eye of reason to behold; but the eye of faith perceives it in Jesus within, as His words also sufficiently testify.

The chief thing in the entire history of the passion is that Christ gave Himself for us and, caring for nothing as much as for our deliverance, reached toward us, and pursued us through all manner of affliction as through a fire. To this main point we should pay especial attention, and cling to it so closely that it cannot be wrested from our hands.

We have need of this doctrine not only as a source of comfort, but also as a source of strength, with which to counteract the poison prescribed to the people by the Pope, who would lift them into heaven by their own righteousness and work and merit. If our works could have done this, why was it necessary for Christ, the Son of God, to suffer? But here we find Him obediently and patiently bringing His offering, His own body and life, and

beseeking His Father to have mercy and to forgive. This is proof sufficient that nothing of the kind could have been accomplished with our works; for it is not as easy a thing to obtain forgiveness of sins as the Papists dream. True, it is easy enough to put on a cowl and to fast, keep vigils and sing a great deal; but to come into possession of pardon for sin requires something quite different from our filthy works, and something far greater. If we rely on our fasts and vigils and prayers, we will have to wait quite a while indeed to receive help of God! But Isaiah states the plan: “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities;” “He hath borne our griefs.” The Papists themselves are constrained to confess that the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus are far exalted above our prayers, our good works, our sufferings, our charity, our fasting. He, therefore, who tries to atone for sin with such things as these, shall surely not succeed. To succeed in this requires, as Isaiah clearly says, a different man and different works and merits. Therefore, he who would apply his own merits to the removing of sin, blasphemes the death and sacrifice and prayer of Christ, because he makes his own prayer and offering equal, nay, superior, to the offering and prayer of Christ. Against this abomination we must diligently guard.

The Lord does not however, pray at random, but makes a distinction between those for whom He prays and others, saying, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” He thus designates two classes of sinners. Some know that they do wrong, and still do so without fear, prompted by pure malice and hatred against the acknowledged divine truth. These commit the “sin unto death,” as it is called 1 John 5, that is, the sin against the Holy Ghost, if they continue in such willful sin and do not confess, abstain from and ask forgiveness for it, but remain impenitent to the end, and besides blaspheme the Word of God and the truth which cannot be gainsaid, as most of the Papists now are doing.

The Papists know that our doctrine is true and divine; they know that Christ commanded us to receive the whole Sacrament, that He did not forbid matrimony, that He gave no command concerning the sacrifice of the mass, and that He died for our sins. Still, they condemn us, who hold these doctrines, as heretics, and punish those of their subjects whom they discover believing our doctrine and using the Sacrament as it was instituted by Christ. This is willful persecution of the truth, and therefore not a sin of

ignorance. They commit this sin in such a way that it cannot be forgiven them; for it is a sin that is in direct conflict with forgiveness, because it is neither abandoned nor confessed. Forgiveness of sin demands that sin be both confessed and renounced.

Other sinners sin ignorantly. But we must understand their case correctly. David, for instance, knew well enough that he was doing wrong and sinning against God in taking the wife of Uriah and then having him slain. But his carnal lust and the devil so impetuously impelled him to the deed that he committed it before rightly considering what he was doing. Afterward, however, he confessed his sin, was grieved by it, wished that he had not committed it, and prayed for mercy.

We all are encumbered with this sin and are easily and unawares led astray. Sometimes we fall through fear, sometimes through carelessness and weakness, like Peter, and sometimes through presumptuousness. Such sins Christ bore with Him to the cross and for such He prayed; for these are bare and naked sins, which are not inconsistent with grace, being recognized and confessed and their forgiveness being sought. Thus we often find that harlots, villains, murderers, and other wicked people, who know that they have done wrong and make no attempt at justifying themselves, find mercy. To the believer God does not impute such acknowledged sins, because the sacrifice of Christ is interposed between them and God. But they who knowingly and willfully persist in sin and even excuse their sins, sin against the Holy Ghost and deny the grace of God. For them Christ does not pray here, but only for those who know not what they do, and who, as said before, fall through fear, weakness and the like. The latter can rely upon the offering and prayer of Christ and can be assured that their sins are forgiven, for Christ here prays for them, and His prayer was surely accepted. We must not doubt this, but find in it consolation and joy.

So much it was meet briefly to say concerning Christ's prayer on the cross, with which He declares why He is suffering there, namely, that they who sin ignorantly and then repent might, for His Sake, have a merciful God, who does not impute to them, but graciously forgives, their sin.

Let us now look a little also at the history of the malefactor on the right of Christ. We can nowhere find an incident of more remarkable beauty than here. The poor fellow cannot deny his sins; he knows that he has sinned,

and that he must now die for his sins. He cannot, therefore, boast before God of any good works, or of any merit of his own. He even reproves his comrade, who, railing on the Lord Jesus, said, "If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us," by answering him thus: We are indeed justly punished, "for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this Man hath done nothing amiss." He thus confesses that he had well deserved that dreadful death. It is a matter of astonishment, therefore, in the first place, that, having every reason to fear God on account of his sins, the malefactor still was confident, as we shall hear, that the Lord Jesus would take him with Him into His kingdom.

It is a matter of great astonishment, in the second place, that this one man did not stumble at the huge stumbling-stone laid in his way by the entire council of Jerusalem, including the temporal and spiritual government, which mocked and reviled the Lord Jesus. The chief spiritual rulers said: "He saved others, let Him save Himself, if He be Christ, the Chosen of God." The soldiers also mocked Him, saying, "If Thou be the King of the Jews, save Thyself;" for the superscription written over Him declared that He was "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The malefactor crucified on the left of Christ said: "If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us." This he said, not because he desired help, but because he wanted to insult and ridicule the Lord. In short, the whole world is offended in Christ, who hangs on the cross, and it does not esteem Him. Even the disciples, although a part of them stood by the cross, had lost all hope.

The poor malefactor on the right alone steps over the rock of offense and dares to call Christ, who hangs on the cross at his side, a Lord and King. He gives the lie to all the world, cares not what others think of him, and proclaims Christ to be an everlasting King. These are his words: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." He calls Christ a Lord, says He has a kingdom, and desires Him, when He shall have entered His kingdom, to remember him. So, the time rendered it certain, that neither of them could live till evening. Therefore he believes that Christ is the Lord of another and an eternal life. This faith and this confession, found, as it was, in the midst of a world that despaired of Christ and hated Him, must have been indeed a great and exquisite faith, – a glorious confession.

The question may occur to us, whence could the malefactor have obtained this abundant and accurate knowledge, by which he was able to recognize and proclaim Christ as the Lord of eternal life, or who could have been his instructor? Without a doubt, he learned this alone from Christ's prayer on the cross. The prophet Isaiah, chap. 53, declares that the Messiah should suffer and be "numbered with the transgressors," and also that He should bear "the sins of many and make intercession for the transgressors." This prophecy was fulfilled on the cross. The innocent Lord, who had done no evil, hangs there between two murderers. And as He begins to pray, and says, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," the malefactor catches the little word "Father." People were not in the habit of conversing with God in this way. Christ is the only One who can speak thus to God, and He it is who has taught us thus to speak. The malefactor hence concludes that Christ must be God's Son, and recognizes Him, by His praying for sinners, as the true Messiah, or Christ. The quoted passages from Isaiah, and similar passages from other prophets which he had heard, either in the temple at Jerusalem, or elsewhere in some synagogue, but which he had not understood, now, no doubt, occurred to him. He takes these passages together, and the Holy Spirit makes these prophecies so bright and clear to his soul that he can contain himself no longer, but confesses with his lips what he believes in his heart, and says, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom."

He would say: Thou art the Son of God. For our sins Thou sufferest on earth this dreadful death upon the cross. But Thou shalt afterward ascend into an everlasting kingdom and be Lord over all. There, O Lord, remember me! I am willing now to die, for I have well deserved death. But do Thou not forget me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. – Behold, what a deep knowledge of Christ Jesus this man derived from Christ's short prayer! This prayer was the sermon that taught him true wisdom.

The knowledge and confession of Christ which proceeded from the malefactor on the cross, is the very same knowledge and confession by which God preserves the Christian Church today. Though everything else should fail, and emperors, kings, popes and bishops cease to be, God will still retain a small company that shall have His Spirit and that shall confess His name before the world. When the disciples, and others who are closely allied to the Lord Jesus, refuse to confess and believe, and deny the Lord

through fear, and are offended in Him and desert Him, then some malefactor or murderer must appear, to confess this Christ, to preach concerning Him, and to teach others what they should think of Him and why they should be comforted in Him. The Lord our God is determined not to leave Christ without followers who confess Him, even if He must have recourse to the thief upon the gallows, or the murderer upon the wheel.

This is, therefore, a consoling history; for it teaches us, first of all, that they who follow Christ and receive all mercy from Him, are none other than those sinners who confess their sins and heartily pray for grace; these shall receive grace and mercy. With His previous prayer, "Father, forgive them," etc., His present action corresponds. He suffers now, that sin may be forgiven. And then, upon the cross, before He dies, the dear Lord soon proves, in the case of the malefactor, or murderer, how beneficial and powerful His sufferings are and what they avail. He there proves that His sufferings benefit all poor sinners who, with the malefactor, believe and confess that Christ is an eternal King; that by His agony, death and resurrection He has acquired for them the forgiveness of their sins and their deliverance from everlasting death; and that He will take them into His eternal kingdom.

Hence we can conclude with such certainty as not to entertain the vestige of a doubt, that Christ did not offer Himself on the cross for saints, for no mortal, let him be who he may, is holy of himself; but that He offered Himself for sinners, for He came to call sinners to repentance and not the righteous, as He Himself says, Matt. 9. Therefore, he who tries to get to heaven by means of a holy life, good works, and personal merits, deceives himself. He who does not confess himself a sinner, can find no access to the Lord Jesus; for Christ did not die for His own, but for the sinner's sake.

Christ converted the malefactor on the cross into a saint, not suffering him to remain and to perish in his sins. We should therefore regard this history as an example showing by very deed what the Redeemer sought and acquired by His sufferings, and what He accomplished by the priestly sacrifice and prayer which He offered on the cross. He took sin upon Himself, not because He delights in sin, neither because He would have us remain under sin and continue in iniquity. No, He suffers for sinners so that they need not go on in sin, and so that they may become converted and be pious and holy. This His purpose was accomplished in the case of the

malefactor, who, being converted, accused himself of sin, but still trusted in the Lord Jesus, believing that God, through Him and for His sake, would forgive his sins and give him life eternal.

The malefactor is thus made an entirely different man. His shameful and justly merited death now becomes a real act of divine service. He suffers no longer as a murderer, but as a saint. He dies in the true confession and in heart-felt confidence in God's grace through Christ. He is sincerely grieved for his sins. He now begins to obey God and to do many good works. With his sufferings he honors and praises God. Publicly, before all the world, he glorifies the crucified Jesus, exhorting and admonishing every one to repent and to believe in this Lord. In short, his faith in Christ does not only cause him to be a saint, but it even bears him into paradise and into everlasting life, according to Christ's promise: "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Let us follow this example and not act like the rude and ungodly, who say: I will sin so that Christ may have a chance to save me and to show me mercy. No, no; but let us say: I am born in sin and am full of filth and evil lusts. It is, therefore, not necessary for me first to sin in order to be able to confess myself a sinner. I have, alas, been only too great a sinner from the very beginning! I am already under the curse of God and condemned to eternal death. Therefore, since God in infinite compassion calls me to repentance, will I now turn myself unto Him and take refuge in this Lord, whose suffering has ransomed sinners, and whose innocent death has delivered me from the death so well deserved and long since merited, and who has reconciled me unto God!

He, however, who abuses this sermon of mercy, and refuses to forsake and confess and repent of his sins, may look upon the murderer on the left of Christ and upon the rulers of the Jews and upon the soldiers, and consider how they fared in their wickedness and what they merited with their impenitent lives. If we would be benefited by the Lord Jesus and by His agony and prayer, we must follow the example of the malefactor who confessed his sins and prayed for grace, and acknowledged that Christ was the Lord and the King of everlasting life.

May the dear Lord Jesus, our eternal King, grant us this. Amen.

**Twelfth Passion Sermon. Christ
Commits His Mother To The
Care Of John. – The Soldiers
Do Not Break The Legs Of
Christ, But With A Spear Pierce
His Side, From Which Blood
And Water Flow. (Translated by
Isensee) John 19:25-37.**

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy Son! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother I And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to His mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was a high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the

soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was dead already, they brake not His legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken. And again another Scripture saith, They shall look on Him whom they pierced.

St. John, toward the end of the passion history, relates three things, about which the other Evangelists do not write, but which are, nevertheless, very important in point of doctrine and consolation. These also must be considered, that we may have the whole of this history before us.

The first of these things is, that Christ, while on the cross, commends His mother to John, and also John to His mother, so that they might be inclined toward each other as are a mother and her son, and that they might love and in every way assist each other. John tells us too that he immediately took the mother of Jesus into his care and treated her as if she had been his own mother.

This narrative is generally regarded as an illustration of the fourth commandment, which says: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." With this accords the fact that John lived longer than the rest of the Apostles, namely, sixty-eight years after the resurrection. Although this explanation is not improper as far as it goes, it is still too narrow; for that which the Lord does and says here upon the cross dare not be regarded as done and said for only a few individuals. Christ intended His works and words to embrace the whole world, but especially the Christian Church.

That, therefore, which Christ here says to Mary and John alone, we must regard as a command for all Christians and for the entire Church. Since Christ hangs upon the cross and, by His death, saves us all from sin and death, we must be toward each other like a mother and her son, who in all things sincerely love, aid and advise each other. This is the meaning also of the command which the Lord so often repeats during the last Supper: "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you;" "A

new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.” The love between a mother and her children is the deepest and most sincere that can be found.

The Lord uses the words “mother” and “son” with special reference to both parts of the Church, viz., to those who teach the Word and to those who hear. Even as a mother nourishes her infant and diligently cares for it till it is grown up and has become strong, so honest pastors also labor and take pains to teach the people and render them good Christians. Thus Paul calls his disciples, whom he had reared as with a mother’s trouble and toil, children, 1 Cor. 4; Gal. 4; 1 Thess. 2. The Church cannot be properly conducted unless they who exercise the office of the ministry have for her the affection of a mother. If they have not this love, the result will be indolence, indifference and unwillingness to suffer. The Lord very explicitly teaches this in the 21. chapter of John. He there commands Peter to preach, but not until He had three times asked him: “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” By this question He meant to say: Unless thou lovest the lambs as a mother loves her children, whom she tries to rescue from the flames even at the peril of her own life, thou wilt never be fit for a preacher. In thy office as pastor, trouble, toil, ingratitude, hatred, envy and many a cross will be thy lot. Now, if the pastors have no motherly heart, no fervent love for the flock, these shall receive poor care indeed.

On the other hand, again, they who have not received the command to preach, but stand in need of information and instruction, must deport themselves like sons, suffering themselves to be taught, led, nourished, and cared for in other ways, thus conducting themselves toward their teachers as a pious child conducts itself toward its mother. True, children’s love for their mother is not as great as the mother’s love for her children, even as the proverb says: *Amor descendit, non ascendit*, that is, love moves downward, not upward. Still, nature prompts pious children to honor their parents, and to serve them and yield to them in everything that they desire and need. When this is the relation between mother and son, between pastor and congregation, then all is well.

If, however, the ministers of the Church are lacking in motherly affection, or if the hearers are void of childlike fidelity, it is out of the question that things should go right and that God should be pleased. This we have sadly experienced in the case of the Pope, the bishops and the

whole priestly rabble, for they have no such motherly love. They think that the office was given them merely that they might be great lords and live at their ease. Therefore, they not only take poor care of the sheep, but they even, to their heart's content, skin and butcher the lambs in life, property and soul, as we only too well see. Again, we frequently find the deficiency in the hearers, that they, like ill-bred children, do not properly provide for their pastors. This is the case, among us, with peasants, with citizens, and especially with the nobility, who deal so closely, stingily and niggardly with their pastors, that seldom one is found who willingly gives to the ministry as much as he should. And this is done in spite of St. Paul's pointed and earnest admonition, not to communicate sparingly of our carnal things unto them that communicate unto us spiritual things. Such ingratitude cannot fail to injure the cause of the Gospel, neither can God's punishment fail to come upon such perverse children.

We should, therefore, carefully observe and take to heart this command of our Lord Jesus, who, upon the cross, shows such tender solicitude both for the teacher and the disciple, that is, for the whole Church. Teachers and pastors He exhorts to motherly love, and pulpits and congregations to childlike faithfulness, gratitude and obedience. If both parties obey these blessed instructions of our dear Lord Jesus, all will be well and God Will bless and give success. So much for the first point.

The other two points, that no bone of Christ was broken and that His side was pierced with a spear, do not appear to be of much importance. Since, however, the Evangelist John adduces the clear testimony of the Scriptures, that Moses and Zechariah had prophesied these things many centuries before they took place, and since the Holy Spirit speaks nothing that is useless or vain, we are bound to confess that these two facts are of great moment, however much they may have the appearance of trifles. The holy Evangelist John, according to true apostolic custom, confers on us a special blessing by everywhere quoting and interpreting Scripture so appropriately.

Moses, as we have already heard, wrote the clear command that no one should "remain all night upon the tree," for God had said that this would defile the land. As this was the day for the preparation, and as the Sabbath would begin with the setting of the sun, the Jews besought Pilate to have the bodies removed from the cross, so that they might be buried yet by day,

before the beginning of the festival. Pilate gave his consent. But as they found the two malefactors yet living, the soldiers, as John says, hastened their departure, at the command of the Jews, by breaking their arms and legs, as they were hanging on the cross. They intended to do the same with the Lord Jesus, but He gave up the ghost before they had finished with the two malefactors, and therefore “they brake not His legs. But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side,” from which, to the astonishment of all, both blood and water flowed. These two things, as I have said, seem of little importance, but John testifies that they were not mere accidents, but that both of them had been foretold, the one by Moses, “Neither shall ye break a bone,” the other by Zechariah, “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced.”

Now, it is true, indeed, that what Moses says, Ex. 12 and Num. 9, refers to the passover. How, then, could it occur to the Evangelist John to say: “These things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken,” and what does he mean by this? He would simply teach us to look upon the Lord Jesus on the cross as the true Passover, of which the old passover in the law is merely the type or symbol.

When God desired with violence to weaken the might of Pharaoh in Egypt and to frustrate his obstinate wantonness and design, and to save His people Israel, He commanded His people, the Jews, in each house, in the appointed night, to slay a lamb of the first year and roast and eat it, but to strike its blood on the door-posts. The destroying angel was to pass over that house on whose doors he should see the token of the blood and smite none of its inmates. But where the token of the lamb’s blood on the door was wanting, there the angel was in that night to smite throughout all Egypt the first-born both of man and beast. As Moses had told the people at God’s command, so it came to pass. In the morning dead men and beasts were found in the houses of all the Egyptians, the destroyer having spared the Jews alone, because their doors were marked and protected by the blood of the lamb.

Let us now turn to our Paschal Lamb, Christ Jesus. He desires to punish Pharaoh and all Egypt, that is, sin, death and Satan, and to rescue His Christian Church from tyranny. Therefore He suffers Himself to be slain like the lamb of old, and to be sacrificed upon the cross, so that He might sprinkle us with His blood, and so that the destroying angel, who, on

account of our sins, had brought death upon us, and had received power over us, might pass over us and do us no harm. Paul, 1 Cor. 5, refers to this so beautifully: "For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us," that we might be partakers of His blood, and that Satan, death and sin might have no authority over us and no power to do us hurt. This it is that John wishes us to learn here from his statement that Christ, like the paschal lamb, had no bone broken.

We would, however, consider here also the other particulars which the Jews had to observe with reference to the passover, so that when we see how perfectly the passover harmonizes with Christ, we may find more consolation in this sacrifice made for us, and take greater interest in the Lord Jesus.

The lamb was required to be without blemish, a male of the first year, healthy and strong; no other lamb would have answered the purposes of the passover. Now, as lambs one year old are very prolific, so this Lamb, the Lord Jesus, brought forth and built up His Church. The Lord Jesus is also without all blemish and deficiency, for He is the Son of God, and His flesh and blood is not sinful like ours, but He is holy altogether.

The Jews were directed to take the lamb from the sheep, or from the goats, on the tenth day of the month, and to keep it by itself until the fourteenth day of the month. In this way Christ was taken from the fold of God, that is, from the Jews, who were God's people, and for this reason He is called the Son of Abraham, or of David. He was separated for the special office of preaching God's kingdom among His people, the Jews, during the four years preceding His passion.

That the lamb had to be eaten in the evening, indicates that Christ should come in the latter times, when the Jews were no longer to be the people of God, and when the law and ceremonies of Moses were to cease. It is for this reason that the Lord sometimes compared His Gospel to a supper, and that the Apostles called the days of the New Testament "the latter times" and "the last days."

The lamb dared not to be eaten sodden or raw, but roasted. Throughout all Scripture, fire is an emblem of suffering and affliction. The lamb roasted with fire is, therefore, a type of Christ, who suffered death upon the cross. We dare not partake of Him raw, that is, he who would receive Him at all,

dare not be careless, secure and profane as our Epicureans are, who think that they can believe and do as they please, and still be good Christians. These do not partake of the lamb properly, and cannot do so any more than they can who eat it sodden with water, that is, they who do not keep the doctrine pure, but adulterate it with human teachings and traditions, as the Pope does.

Unleavened bread and bitter herbs had to be eaten with the lamb. Thus Paul says: "Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven," refusing to check sin and to amend our conduct; "neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness," dealing in hypocrisy and not heartily repenting; "but with the unleavened bread of sincerity," keeping a clear Conscience and living in the fear of God; "and truth," sincerely, not hypocritically, asking God's blessing and earnestly desiring to regulate ourselves according to His Word. This is the unleavened bread.

The herbs signify the holy cross; for, as Paul says: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

No part of the lamb was allowed to remain, but the whole of it had to be eaten, or else that which remained was to be burned with fire. Neither should a bone of it be broken. Just so it is with Christ. He who would be a true Christian dares not eat one part and leave another part uneaten. He must accept and believe everything that Christ says, and must not, like the fanatics and sects, eat His words piecemeal. Arius was satisfied with everything else, only he would not believe that Christ was eternal God. The Anabaptists reject the baptism of children, despise this, the original institution, and fancy that they have found a better. The Sacramentarians of the present day accept everything Christ says, and think themselves excellent Christians. But it is not to their liking that Christ said, when He took the bread, "Take, eat; this is my body," and when He took the cup, "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the New Testament," and this they do not want to believe. They do not like the taste of this and so they leave it uneaten, in spite of God's command that the whole of this Paschal Lamb should be eaten, or else the remainder burned with fire. And more than this, they even break the bones, that is, torture, crucify and mangle at pleasure the Word of the Lord Jesus, only so that they may give their scandalous error some plausibility. Thus we find that the Pope, the Anabaptists, the Sacramentarians and, in short, all the sects, eat only that

part of the lamb that suits their taste, and let the parts that they do not relish remain, and break them to pieces.

What must be done with the blood has already been related, viz., the blood of the Lamb is to prevent sin, death and hell from hurting us, and, for all time to come, to hinder Pharaoh and the Egyptians, that is, Satan and the world, from oppressing and subduing us. Christ was sacrificed that He might make us free, John 8, and undo and destroy the work of Satan.

Of all this John would remind us when he says: "These things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken." He wishes us to regard the passover as the faithful picture of the entire benefit and of the real fruit of our Lord Jesus' sufferings. He wishes us to see that Christ was sacrificed for us and that His blood is to deliver us from sin, death and the devil, which constantly oppress, alarm and coerce us in the same way in which Pharaoh retained and vexed the children of Israel in Egypt. The blood of our Paschal Lamb, Christ Jesus, has abolished this servitude. We now have peace, and, fully free from every burden, we shall pass from dangerous Egypt over to the land of promise and to life eternal.

We shall now consider the third point, which the Evangelist evidently regarded as very important. He not only introduces the testimony of the Prophet Zechariah, who had prophesied concerning this piercing of Christ's side; but he also uses many and solemn words to affirm the miracle, that blood and water flowed from the dead body. This was unnatural, because when a man is dead his blood is cold and does not flow; and it was still more unnatural for both blood and water to flow from a corpse. Therefore John says: "He that saw it bare record, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." He thus calls our attention to this miracle as one of great importance, so that we might diligently study it and finally learn from it to believe; that is, that we might through Christ and His death, as was said above when speaking of the passover, have the hope of the forgiveness of sins and of everlasting life. This is the chief design of this narrative as given by the Evangelist, with whom, as we shall soon see, the prophet completely corresponds.

First of all, however, let us rid ourselves of the idea that it was merely a casual circumstance that one of the soldiers thrust his spear into the corpse's side. The soldier, of course, did this in ignorance of any exalted

signification the act might have. Still it was done by God's special arrangement, else the Holy Spirit would not have prophesied concerning it through Zechariah so many centuries before. We see that the Lord retained the wounds in His body after the resurrection, and that He showed them to His disciples in particular as a mark by which they might recognize Him. This piercing of Christ's side and this gushing forth of blood and water were not, therefore, mere accidents, but they were intended to mean and to accomplish something.

We must here be on our guard, lest we imitate the example commonly set by rude people, who say: It is none of my business what flowed from the Lord Jesus' side; it is enough for me to know that He died on the cross. Let us not think in this way, but let us honor the Holy Ghost and contribute to our own comfort by carefully learning what was accomplished by this piercing of Christ's side with the spear, which John so faithfully relates and which Zechariah had foretold so long before.

In the first place, it is certain beyond all dispute, that it is unnatural for a deceased body to sweat or bleed. As soon as blood grows cold it no longer flows, but it stagnates. The dead body before us now, however, is different from all other dead bodies, and hence things take place in it that do not take place in any other body. True, Christ's body was flesh and blood like our own, and it died as ours must die. Yet, His flesh and blood were sinless, and therefore He died in such a way that even in His death a sign of life remained. The blood in all other bodies is soon cold and stagnant, "but in the body of the Lord Jesus it remains so warm and active that, as soon as His side is pierced, it rushes forth as from a living body's opened vein.

John wishes us to observe this carefully, and to learn from it that it is the true nature of the blood of our dear Lord Jesus to flow and live and be efficacious even after He has died. Neither was the blood of the paschal lamb used while the lamb lived, but after it was dead and had been eaten.

The angel went by night through Egypt and smote all the first-born, but the houses of the Jews which were marked with the blood of the lamb he spared, and in them smote none. And thus the blood of our dear Lord Jesus continues still to live and flow, having neither become stagnant nor grown cold.

It flows and gushes after He is dead, and all who are sprinkled with it have the forgiveness of sin and are children of eternal life.

We should mark this well, for this unnatural flowing shows that the blood of our dear Lord Jesus, as that of the true Paschal Lamb, retained its influence and power and virtue even after Christ's death; that it should flow upon, sprinkle and mark the faithful standing by the cross; and that Satan, death and sin should let alone all upon whom they find this mark, and not have power to hurt them. Such is the true nature, power and virtue of the blood of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, and such it forever remains in His Church even after His death.

Besides the blood, however, water also came out of Christ's side. This, no doubt, was to serve as an indication that the blood of Christ would sprinkle only those who were baptized in His name. Our Lord Jesus Himself says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Blood and water go together. Where Christ's blood is and operates, there the water of blessed Baptism also is; but where the water does not flow, that is, where there is no holy Baptism, there the blood of Christ is also wanting, nor does it flow there nor sprinkle any one, as it is the case among the Turks and Jews and heathen. Evermore must blood and water flow on together, and neither be separated from the other.

We must mark this well, for it has great value. It is not of great import for those who died under the Old Testament and who did not live to see Baptism; for they had their own Baptism and were saved by faith in the blessed Seed. Nor is it so important on account of infants who die in their mother's womb before they can be brought to Baptism; for their parents and the Christian assistants of those in travail bring to Christ the offering of fervent prayer in the hour of danger, and they are, without a doubt, accepted graciously. But the value of this token of mercy is our own, and we should not despise it and not prevent ourselves nor our families from accepting it. Where the water of this Baptism is, there too must be the blood of Christ, for water and blood come from His side together; and we have already seen the value of this blood, viz., it defends us against the destroying angel, cleanses us from sin, and causes us to live forever. The prophet, in such perfect harmony with the Evangelist, beautifully indicates this in Zech. 12, where he says: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the

inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.”

It cannot be denied, in the first place, that the prophet here speaks of the time of the New Testament and of the grace which should come upon us through the death of Christ. This grace, moreover, consists in God’s pouring upon us “the Spirit of grace and of supplication,” that is, God, through His Holy Spirit, brings comfort to our souls, so that we trust in His mercy and compassion through Christ, and call upon Him in every time of need, and seek help from Him, as children seek help from their father.

In the second place, John here throws upon us the light of his true apostolic spirit, when he says that the piercing, of which the prophet proceeds to speak, was done on the occasion of the crucifixion. The prophet tells us what shall be the result of this piercing, in these words: “They,” mark you, they who have the Spirit of grace and of supplications, – “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born. This mourning and this bitterness mean nothing else than the thorough recognition of the sine for whose sake Christ suffered on the cross. Our looking upon Him who is pierced and our mourning for Him and om; being sorrowful, indicates that He is innocent and that He suffered all for us.

His suffering thus, however, causes us to perceive our danger and distress, to desist from carelessly participating with the world in sin, to deplore our sinful heart and wicked life, to ask God for forgiveness, and to cling to the sufferings of Christ and console ourselves with them because He, being holy and obedient, did not deserve to die, but still took upon Himself and suffered death because He loved us so unspeakably.

It is necessary for us that we should pity, mourn and lament in the way stated above, and it is necessary for Christ to have our sympathy, grief and tears, or else He can have no Christian Church. The Church alone, as Zechariah says, looks upon the wounded Christ and weeps for Him, but not like the women at Jerusalem, for they wept for Christ in such a way as to overlook themselves. The tears of the believers, of the Christian Church,

flow because the sins are seen within them, for which Christ suffered death. Thus the prophet plainly points out to us the fruits of Christ's sufferings. And soon after, in the 13. chapter, he says: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."

How closely the prophet unites the spear-thrust and the fountain, that is, the blood and the water, or holy Baptism. Now, if we would interpret this narrative correctly, we must say: Blood flows from the Lord Jesus' side for the washing away and forgiveness of my sins. The Lord Himself testifies to this when He takes the cup in the Holy Supper. But water also comes forth to show that His body is an open fountain. But why is it such? "For sin and for uncleanness." Baptism applies to us the blood of our Lord Jesus, for which reason Paul expresses this by saying, we are baptized into Christ's death, that is, we are baptized that the death of Christ might be our own and for our good, so that, being delivered from sin and death, we might live forever.

The holy fathers say some beautiful things about this. Augustine says 'that John uses the word "pierced,"— "One of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side,"— to show that the door of life was thus thrown open as it were, through which door came to us the holy Sacraments of the Church, without which Sacraments it is impossible to enter into that life which is the real life. He speaks of Sacraments, in the plural, because he refers not only to Baptism, which is represented by the water, but also to the Holy Supper, in which we drink, Christ's blood. Chrysostom speaks after the same manner, saying: Whereas the sacred Mysteries here take their origin, thou must approach the holy Cup as if thou wast about to drink from the Lord Jesus' side.

The Sacramentarians dare not quote this passage of Chrysostom, for they boast that the whole of the old Church believed as they do, viz., that in the Lord's Supper there are only bread and wine, and not the body and blood of Christ. Now, how does this boast harmonize with the words of Chrysostom? They surely cannot be so blind and frantic as to say that wine flowed from Christ's side, and yet they say that in the Holy Supper we do not drink the blood of Christ, but merely wine. They must admit, on the testimony of Chrysostom, who says, thou must approach the holy Cup as if thou wast

about to drink from Christ's side, that the ancient Church discerned not only wine, but also blood, in the Sacrament of the altar.

It is this flowing of both water and blood from Christ's side, that is said to have given rise to the custom of mixing the wine used in the Supper of the Lord with water. Cyprian vigorously defends this custom as a special ordinance of Christ, and the Armenians were condemned as heretics for not complying with it. Since Christ, however, did not command this to be done, and since the words of the institution tell us merely that Christ took the cup and gave it to His disciples, it is not necessary to hold this custom as essential.

We therefore let this matter rest and confine ourselves to the doctrine taught us by the holy Evangelist, which is, that the blood of our dear Lord Jesus Christ shall forever retain its power and efficacy after Christ's death, and shall preserve us from death and sin, provided we are baptized with water as Christ commanded. In Baptism we find the blood of Christ in reality, even as blood and water flow together here. Where the blood is, there is the water also, and where the water is, there also is the blood, and it accomplishes its purpose, which is to wash away our sins and to make us perfectly clean, even as Zechariah says when he prophesies concerning the open fountain "for sin and for uncleanness."

We should, therefore, thank God for the ineffable mercy and compassion, by which He has led us to this fountain, to be baptized in the name of His Son, and thus to be cleansed from our sins in the blood of Jesus Christ. We may now hope, through the Spirit of grace, to receive from God all good things, and can now call upon God in every hour of need, through the Spirit of supplications. And the final blessing of Christ's death shall come upon us in the end, when we leave this world of sorrows and enter life eternal.

May God bestow this upon every one of us. Amen.

Thirteenth Passion Sermon. Christ's Body Taken Down From The Cross And Laid In A Tomb. – The Soldiers Guard The Tomb. (Translated by Isensee) Matt. 27:57-66.

When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus disciple: he went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body *o be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre. Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night, and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

The concluding events related in the history of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus are His removal from the cross, His being laid in a new tomb, and the guarding of the tomb by the soldiers. And a most appropriate conclusion this is; for it shows how the death of our dear Lord Jesus influences both His friends and His enemies. His enemies become uneasy and apprehensive, and they perceptibly sink deeper into sin. They, however, who honestly love the Lord Jesus, are made confident and bold by the death of Christ, notwithstanding their weakness and timidity, and now venture to do what before they would not have thought of doing. The death of our dear Lord Jesus has just the same effect on men in our day, as we shall soon hear.

The shameful death of Christ upon the cross was indeed a most severe offense. Hence His foes blaspheme Him to the utmost, while His disciples, who had been about Him, did not dare to show themselves, and had no other thought than that all was over with Him now. His mother, the dear Virgin Mary, stood there distressed and full of sorrow, and other women with her. Now, although she closely kept in her heart the saying of the angel, and pondered the prophecies spoken by pious and holy people, such as the aged Simeon and Anna, a prophetess, when Jesus was yet a child, Luke 2, her affliction still overwhelmed her so and the offense so wounded her heart, that she could not speak. Thus the small assembly that had hitherto adhered to Christ and kept Him company is perfectly mute. The condemned malefactor is the only one who moves or speaks. Christ's enemies carry the day and are full of hope and gladness. The clamor made is all their own, the rest must hold their peace.

The weakness and timidity of these pious people serves, as said above, to teach us not to be rash and not to place too much reliance in ourselves. If these almost lose sight of comfort and are swallowed up, as it were, by grief and misery, how much more shall not we be subject to such weakness when called upon to expose ourselves or to suffer for the Gospel's sake. How very necessary, therefore, that we should abide in the fear of God and pray for the Holy Spirit, that He may enlighten and comfort our hearts, and make us bold enough to dare and to bear something for the glory of God and for the sake of His Word.

When the offense was at its very height, and when they who had been the best Christians and had fearlessly clung to the Lord Jesus began to falter and to shrink, and, on account of fear, sorrow and gloom, knew not what to

do nor whither to go, the first to approach was Joseph of Arimathea, a city which is also called Arumah, Joshua 15 and Judges 9. Joseph was not a plain and common citizen, like the Apostles, who were simply common people, but he was a member of the council of Jerusalem and very rich. He it was who ventured to go to Pilate and beg for the dead body, that he might take it down from the cross and bury it. And then came also Nicodemus, who, although he loved the Lord and His Word, had been so timorous that he came to Him only by night. He brought about a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, so that the Lord might not be buried meanly, but with honor. It was customary among the Jews, as John relates, because they had derived from the Word of God the hope of the resurrection and of everlasting life, to give the bodies of the deceased a decent burial by preparing them with myrrh and aloes, so that they would not only be preserved for a long time and decay slowly, but also that they would have an agreeable odor.

Mark and Luke specially mention that Joseph was a disciple of Christ, that is, he attentively and approvingly heard Christ preach, and waited for the kingdom of God. We must carefully bear this in mind, for from this we learn what prompted him to have the boldness to go to Pilate, which was not a trifling matter.

The chief priests and the entire council at Jerusalem had accused the Lord Jesus as a perverter of the nation, as a deceiver and blasphemer, and on this accusation Pilate based his judgment. Now, Joseph, who had taken no part in any of the proceedings against the Lord Jesus and did not want to be present at His trial, did a very dangerous thing when he sought Christ's body for a decent burial. He was thus likely to incur the fury of the whole council and of Pilate himself, who had condemned the Lord, and he thus gave them to understand that in his opinion Christ had been a pious and a good Man, who had been wronged in the sight of God and the world.

What moved him so boldly to expose himself? Only this, he was waiting for the kingdom of God. That is, he still believed that God's kingdom would not fail to come, and that Christ, although He had so miserably hung and died upon the cross, would be raised from the dead by God, and that He would accomplish and furnish everything necessary to fulfill the prophecies concerning the Messiah and his kingdom. If the centurion who stood over against Him and saw Christ die when He had cried with a loud voice,

learned so much from various occurrences, such as the darkness and the earthquake, that he openly confessed: “Truly this Man was the Son of God,” how much more would not this Joseph and pious Nicodemus also have had such thoughts! Without a doubt, the preaching of the prophets, and the words of Christ which they had repeatedly heard and which they had now, through the admonition of the Holy Spirit, taken to heart for the first time, conveyed to them the hope that Christ had not been finally disposed of, but that God would establish His kingdom now when men least looked for it. Christ had, for instance, preached to Nicodemus a powerful sermon on this hope, telling him, John 3, that as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness so He also would be lifted up on the cross.

The Holy Spirit, at that time, kindled such thoughts in their weak and timid hearts, which soon influenced them so that Joseph goes to Pilate and asks for the body of Him whom Pilate had condemned as a disturber and blasphemer. Nicodemus brings myrrh and aloes, with which to give the Lord a costly and decent burial, as their testimony before all the world that they yet hoped that God’s kingdom still would come, although defied by Jerusalem’s haughtiest boast that Christ was gone and things would soon be changed.

Such is the fruit of our dear Lord Jesus’ death. The weakest and most diffident distinguish themselves by boldly and fearlessly confessing Christ and by asking for His body, which hangs in the greatest disgrace, that they might bury it with the greatest honor. They thus testify that they, in spite of Jews, chief priests, Pilate, and all foes of Christ, regard and glorify Christ as the Son of God, hope for His kingdom, and find comfort in Him even now when He is dead and when every body thinks that He is gone forever. This is exactly as Mark and Luke say: Joseph “waited for the kingdom of God,” that is, he hoped that God, through this Man, would found a new kingdom on the earth, forgive sins, and impart the Holy Spirit and eternal life. For, according to the prophets, the great, essential feature of God’s kingdom is, that Christ, or the Messiah, must establish it.

Isaiah’s prophecy concerning Christ, “A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench,” is here fulfilled in the case of Joseph and Nicodemus. Hitherto they were weak and timid Christians. They suffered much from their fear, which prevented them from making an open confession. It is for this reason that John speaks of Nicodemus, who came

to Jesus by night, as a secret disciple. Christ forgave them this fear, and did not cast them away on account of it. Now, however, when the danger is greatest and when they who usually were such strong and bold Christians are overcome by the offense, and fear to let themselves be seen, the Holy Spirit, through the death of Christ, fans the smoking and nearly smothered flax until it makes a blaze as bright as the beautiful sun. What Joseph had so far been thinking and believing of Christ in secret, he now makes known to all, fearing neither the Jews nor Pilate. He cares more for Christ, who died in the deepest disgrace, than for all the world. Let us not regard this as insignificant, or as a mere result of Christ's sufferings. These things are written as examples for us all, that we should imitate Joseph and Nicodemus. When Christ hangs on the cross, that is, when the Gospel is persecuted and poor Christians are tortured for its sake, we should stand forth, and, not heeding the tyrant's wrath, glorify God's Son and His Word, and honor it by publicly confessing it until Christ who died shall appear in His glorious resurrection, when fainthearted, timid, and fearful Christians also shall receive comfort and return to the confession.

Such changes shall always occur in the Church. Some are offended and fall back, and generally the strongest grow weak when affliction comes, while the weakest advance and let their joyful confession be heard, so that there are always some who acknowledge and confess Christ. Whether it is unwillingness or inability that keeps the strong from doing this, on account of the offense, the very weakest, who make no display at all, must do it for them, and the former then learn and experience the utter nothingness of men when God removes His Spirit from them. God, as a rich House-holder, wants all kinds of servants in His house; not only such as are strong and full grown, but also such as are weak and small. That the strong may not despise the rest, they have occasion given them to see weakness in themselves; and that no one may judge his fellow, God's Spirit comes upon the weak, admonishing, comforting and strengthening them in such measure that all must see and praise God's power in them. The sufferings of our dear Lord Jesus operate thus in His Church forever, in order that it may not go to ruin, but stand and grow and expand.

What, however, is the effect on those who hate the Lord Jesus, and who have no peace until they have crucified Him? Just the reverse. The effect of Christ's death can be compared to the effect of the sun, which is different

on different materials. Wax is softened and melted by the sun, while mud is made hard and dry. Pious hearts are made so cheerful and bold by the sufferings of Christ, that they venture to do what they would by no means have attempted while Christ yet lived.

The godless Jews hurried Christ off to death in the hope that, when He should have been silenced, their cares would forever be gone. But when their malice was gratified in seeing that Christ had died upon the cross and was laid into a new tomb, they begin to be uneasy, and they all go to Pilate and say:

“Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night, and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.”

If we carefully notice these words we shall find what kind of hearts these people had. They remembered Christ’s sayings well enough and understood them too, but what fruit did His sayings bring forth in them? Joseph and Nicodemus, who, no doubt, also remembered these words and comforted themselves with them at the time they were spoken, are now made courageous and joyful by them, and hope for every blessing. But these knaves grow restless, and begin to get scared at the dead Man, however natural it may otherwise be for men not to fear an enemy after they know him to be dead. The wicked Jews enjoy no such composure, but, as we see, they fear the departed Christ, who is lying in the tomb.

Before Pilate they pretended that His disciples might steal Him away and say that He is risen; but in their hearts the words of the Lord Jesus are such a pricking and piercing thorn that they anxiously ask themselves: What if they were true after all? What if He should be the Messiah and rise again from the dead? What would become of us then? – This disturbs and disheartens them. But they are none the better for these thoughts. They do not argue thus: Alas, what have we done! Let us yet creep to the cross and not despise the excellent admonitions and miracles which came to light at His death. – No, they do not want to think in this way. They persist in that hatred and enmity with which they persecuted the Lord Jesus. They perceptibly grow worse and more wicked still. They devise all possible

means and ways for annihilating the Lord Jesus and for diminishing His glory. This too was written as an example and warning for us, that, when we see similar things done by the enemies of the Word, we may not become frightened. God's inevitable rule is this: the longer a man willfully opposes the Word, the deeper he must sink into sin, and the longer he seeks rest, the greater shall grow his restlessness and fear. It was just so too in the case of the blood of the Lord Jesus, of which we heard above. The Jews thought it a very little thing that they nailed Christ to the cross and slew Him. In a deliberate, careless and trifling spirit they say: "His blood be on us, and on our children." They afterward found what a little thing it was, alas, for Jerusalem and the whole land to be ruined on account of this. Here the case is exactly as it was there. They thought: If only this Jesus were out of the way once, we should not be troubled any more. Now, in the 2. chapter of Acts it is written that Christ was "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" into the shameful death upon the cross. This only increased the fears of the Jews, so that they had less peace than before. The words of Christ, although they did not believe them, still lay in their hearts like a burning fire, or a gnawing worm. While they could not believe them, they still could not altogether set them aside. So it must always be with the foes of the Word. The more they seek peace by means of tyranny, the deeper they fall, not only into trouble, but also into sin.

Although their plans may be laid in the greatest wisdom, they shall find in the end that they have only injured their cause, and aided the Gospel in spite of themselves, just as it was with the Jews. These demanded guards of Pilate, who should make the sepulchre sure until the third day. "Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can." Matthew says, "They went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch." This they did to prevent the disciples from stealing the body of the Lord Jesus and from telling the people that Christ was risen from the dead. It was very wisely schemed, but how did it succeed? Their very fears were realized. When, early on Easter morning, Christ had risen from the dead, and the angel descended from heaven and came to the sepulchre and rolled back the stone from the door, and a great earthquake came, the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. As soon as they had recovered from the shock, they gathered themselves up, one ran this way, another that, and came to Jerusalem, where they told the chief priests all the things that were done. What, think you, must then have been the thoughts of

these priests? How must their hearts not have quaked and trembled! They could not look on it as a jest, for there stood their own witnesses, the soldiers of Pilate, whom Pilate himself had sent to guard the tomb. These not only told them, but also showed in their entire conduct, what had happened. So severe a fright as theirs had been, is not so easily concealed. The speech betrays it; the countenance shows it; the whole body is so affected by it, as to make it known. It is, therefore, easily seen that this message must have terribly frightened the chief priests and elders. Instead, however, of being bettered by this message, they only rushed deeper into sin and made their evil conscience worse. They held a council on that very Sabbath day, and gave much money to the soldiers that they might help them lie, and instructed them to say, "His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept." In this way these poor fellows sought to console and help themselves. They believed in their hearts that Christ, whom they had delivered to die, though innocent, had risen from the dead. Each one can imagine for himself how this must have troubled them; for, under such circumstances, their hearts could never have been calm. And yet, they gave much money to have their lies spread, and to have people persuaded to believe what they themselves did not believe. They who thus willfully resist the truth, and adorn and comfort themselves with known falsehoods, are surely spiteful and desperate wretches. We should learn this, so that we may know how to look upon the foes of the Word. He who resists the truth, as has been said already, has only falsehood left to shield him.

In the meanwhile our dear Lord Jesus comforts His few scattered followers, and shows Himself to them, and proves to them by very deed that He is not dead, but living, and living as the Conqueror of death forever. The lies of those who hate the Word only help so much the more to spread the tidings and to give them notoriety. Had the Jews not guarded the tomb themselves, the falsehood, that Christ's body had been stolen, would have been more plausible; but it does not serve its purpose; for the guards had been stationed around the tomb, and the door of the sepulchre had been carefully sealed. The very fact of their fleeing sufficiently shows that a higher and greater power than that of Pilate and his guards was present.

So it always is with the enemies of the Gospel, They must resort to base and blasphemous lies, which, however, do not harm the Word, but further it in spite of them. This should move every one to learn to know and to flee

from lies, and to abide by the Word and by the truth. God be praised that some in our day have learned this, and that the Papists only advanced the cause of the Gospel with their lying and clamoring and scribbling! Their lies are published in such clumsy shape that men are driven to the truth by them. The longer the enemies of the truth attack it, the more violent they become; but the suffering of our dear Lord Jesus has brought it about that they must thus, against their will, further the truth.

The Evangelists relate particularly that the sepulchre, into which the Lord Jesus was laid, was in a garden, that no one had ever been laid into it, and that Joseph had ordered it to be made for himself. This is related, not only to make the evidence of Christ's resurrection more reliable, but also because the body to be buried was not an ordinary one, but was different from all that had ever been on earth, and therefore deserved a special and new house, or tomb.

The flesh and blood of our dear Lord Jesus was like our own, with only this difference, that the flesh and blood in which the Son of the eternal Father appeared was holy flesh and blood. It was proper, therefore, that this flesh and blood should rest from its work in an entirely new tomb. The sepulchre was not His own, however, but that of Joseph. Christ did not become man and die for His own, but for our sake; and even so He lies in the tomb for our sake, and His tomb is our tomb. He had no tomb of His own, because He did not intend to remain in death and the grave; and so shall we through His resurrection be called from death and the grave on the judgment day and live with Him forever.

Another thing worthy of notice here is the conduct of Joseph, who had a tomb made for himself while he was yet living. This clearly shows that he did not leave the last hour out of mind, as the children of the world are wont to do, for they accommodate themselves to this life as if they were to remain here always. The pious look upon their whole earthly life as a pilgrimage, for they know that they have no continuing city here, and therefore they desire a better country, that is, an everlasting and a heavenly.

A man on a journey may come to a pleasant inn, but he does not wish to abide there, for he knows that it is not his home. So Christians look upon this life as a lodging-place for a night. Kind treatment they accept with gratitude, but if the inn, as is generally the case, is cold and poor and

uncomfortable, they find comfort in the thought that when this one cheerless night is over all will be well. Pious Joseph looked upon life in this way. He was a wealthy and honorable citizen of Jerusalem, still his constant thoughts were these: Thou canst not remain here always; thou too must take thy leave. Hence in the garden in which he delighted, he had a tomb prepared for himself, in which he expected to rest while waiting with all the saints for the glorious resurrection through Christ.

The rich should consider this and also erect such monuments on their pleasure-grounds, that they might be reminded of the life to come and be drawn away from the present life. But we find that every one seeks to avoid such thoughts, and aspires only after mirth and pleasure, although they are uncertain and transient and cannot be relied on even for one moment.

Thus, dear Christians, you have heard the whole history of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. We have now seen God's Son Himself toiling under the weight of sin and atoning for sin with His death. Hence this history would teach us, first of all, that the burden of sin is great and grievous, so that we might be led to live in the fear of God and to beware of such a burden.

It also teaches us to find all comfort in Christ's sacrifice, so that should even sin and death attack us, we might still have the consolation sure that Christ has atoned for our sins, and that God, for Christ's sake, will be satisfied with us and not hold our sins in remembrance. These are the two chief doctrines which the history of the passion teaches us and in which we should constantly exercise ourselves.

This history, because it sets before us the example of Christ, is profitable besides for patience in suffering. It also urges us to love our neighbor, which the Lord Himself often urges us to do in words like these: "Love one another, as I have loved you." But who is able to relate all the benefits of our Lord Jesus' sufferings?

We should therefore heartily thank God for this doctrine, and pray that He through His Holy Spirit would make it burn brightly in our souls, and make us stronger day by day in faith and love and patience, until we shall have passed from this life of sorrow to the lite eternal.

May our merciful heavenly Father, through His Holy Spirit, grant as this for the sake of Jesus Christ, His dear Son, our Lord. Amen.

Summer Portion Of The House Postil.

First Easter Sermon. The Power And The Benefit Of The Resurrection Of Christ. (Translated by Prof. E. Schmid) Matt. 28:1-10.

In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held

Him by the feet, and worshiped Him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

The present festival directs our attention to that consolatory and joyful article of our Creed, in which we confess that Christ on the third day arose again from the dead. This requires us, first of all, to know and consider the Easter narrative, then also to learn why this has happened and how to enjoy its benefits.

The Easter events were these. On the evening of Thursday before Easter, when Christ had arisen from the Supper and had gone into the garden, He was betrayed by Judas and taken prisoner by the Jews. These dragged Him from one high priest to the other, until they finally concluded to give Him over into the hands of Pilate, who as governor had the power to pronounce judgment. About the third hour of the day sentence was passed upon Him, when He was led forth to execution and was crucified. At the sixth hour, about noon, or an hour later, an earthquake occurred and the sun was darkened. Towards the ninth hour, which would be nearly three hours before sunset, Christ died upon the cross. This is according to the statement of Mark; the other Evangelists do not state so definitely the hours in which these events took place.

In our Creed we confess that Christ arose again on the third day, which is far different from saying that He arose after three days. The Lord was not dead three entire nights and days. On Friday evening, about three hours before dark, He died. These three hours are called the first day. During the whole night and day of the Sabbath He remained in the grave, and also the following night until the next morning. This night counts also a day; for the Jews begin their day with the night, and count night and day as one whole day. We reverse this method of counting and call the day first the night one day. In the Church, however, the old Jewish method of reckoning the festivals was retained, so that these always begin with the evening of the previous day.

Very early on Sunday morning, which was the third day after the Friday on which Christ was crucified, at the first dawn of day, when the soldiers were lying around the tomb, Christ, who had died, awoke to a new, eternal life, and arose from the dead in such a manner that the guards around the

grave were unaware of His resurrection. From the account which Matthew gives of this event we must infer that Christ did not arise during the earthquake, which evidently began when the angel descended from heaven and rolled away the rock from the entrance of the tomb. Christ, however, passed out from the closed grave without disturbing the seals put upon it, just as on the evening of the same day He also came to His disciples through the doors which were shut.

When the earth began to quake and the angel appeared, the soldiers were so terrified that they lost all consciousness. As soon as they recovered they all ran from the grave, some in this, others in that direction; for the coming of the angel was to them no occasion of rejoicing, but one of terror and distress. There were others, however, who should be comforted by the cheerful tidings of the angel.

While the soldiers ran from the tomb, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, also Peter and John soon after, came to see the sepulchre. When the women arrive, the angel comforts them, telling them that Christ had arisen and that they should see Him in Galilee. He also orders them to depart in haste and to announce these things to the disciples. As the women return from the sepulchre the Lord meets Mary Magdalene in the guise of the gardener, and appears also to Peter, as John relates. In the evening of the same day He joins Himself to the two disciples who are walking to Emmaus, and revealed Himself unto them when He brake the bread and gave it to them. After these two disciples had hastily returned to Jerusalem, to announce to the others what had happened unto them, how they had seen the Lord, and when the disciples were amazed at this, some however still doubting the truth of such report. Jesus suddenly appears in their midst, the doors being closed. John 20.

These are the incidents of the holy Easter festival in reference to the revelation of our Lord and Saviour, as we learn from the Evangelists. It behooves us to be well acquainted with these facts; they refer to that article of our Creed which confesses that Christ arose again from the dead on the third day.

The mere knowledge of these events, however, is not enough; we must also realize their meaning and importance. Of these we will now speak a

little; for the subject is so fertile and inexhaustible, that we could not fully present it though We preached about it every day of the year.

If we desire to comprehend the benefits of the resurrection of Christ, we must keep in view two distinct pictures. The one is sombre, full of distress, misery, and woes; it is the scene of blood presented to us on Good Friday – Christ crucified between murderers and dying with excruciating pain. This scene we must contemplate with much earnestness, as already said, to realize that it all happened on account of our sins, yea, that Christ as the true High Priest sacrificed Himself for us and paid with His death our debts. We ought all to know that our sins thus wounded and tormented Christ, and that His sufferings were caused alone by our iniquities. Therefore, as often as we remember or view this doleful, bloody scene, we ought to bear in mind that we have before us our sins and the terrible wrath of God against them, a wrath so dire that no creature could endure it, that all atonement became impossible except the one made by the sacrifice and death of the Son of God. If this awful scene were the only one presented to our sight, and if it remained unchanged, it would be too terrible and painful.

But this picture of sorrow is changed, and in our Creed we join closely together these two articles: “Christ was crucified, died, was buried and descended into hell, and on the third day He rose again from the dead.” Yea, ere three days had gone by, our Lord and Saviour presents to us another picture, beautiful, full of life, lovely and cheerful, in order that we might have the sure consolation that not only our sins were annihilated in the death of Christ, but that by His resurrection a new eternal righteousness and life was obtained, as St. Paul says, Rom. 4: “Christ was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.” And 1 Cor. 15: “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” As in the former scene we saw the burden of our sin upon Him and bringing Him to the cross, so in this other scene of the resurrection we witness no longer sin, pain and sorrow, but only righteousness, joy and happiness. It is the victory of life over death – a life everlasting, with which this temporal existence on earth cannot be compared. Of this we have reason to rejoice. Merely to view the former scene would be terrible, but when we view it in connection with the glad event of the resurrection, and when we bear in mind why our

Lord suffered thus, we will derive from such a contemplation much benefit and consolation. It will become apparent to us how inexpressibly great the love of God toward us poor sinners was, as He had compassion on our misery, even to such an amazing extent that He did not spare His beloved and only Child, but gave Him up for us, to bear upon the cross and in death the burden of our transgressions, which were too heavy for us and would have crushed us to the earth. This load was taken from us and placed by God Himself upon His Son, who, as God from eternity, could alone bear the heavy weight of sin. Upon Him we now find our burden. Let us leave it there, for there is no one else to be found who could better relieve us of it.

The other scene presents to us Christ no longer in woe and misery, weighed down with the ponderous mass of our sins, which God has laid upon Him, but beautiful, glorious and rejoicing; for all the sins have disappeared from Him. From this we have a right to conclude: If our sins, on account of the sufferings of Christ, lie no longer upon us, but are taken from our shoulders by God Himself and placed upon His Son, and if on Easter, after the resurrection, they are no more to be seen, where then are they? Micah truly says: They are sunk into the depth of the sea, and no devil nor any body else shall find them again.

This article of our faith is glorious and blessed; whoever holds it not is no Christian; yet all the world reviles, slanders and abuses it. The Pope and his cardinals generally treat even this narrative as a fable to be laughed at; they are full-grown Epicureans, who smile with scorn when told of an eternal life to come. Our nobility, our burghers and our peasants also, believe in a future life, rather from custom than from true conviction, else they would act otherwise and not busy themselves solely with the cares, honors and employments of this temporal life, but would rather seek after that which is eternal. But we may preach and explain as we will, the world regards it all as foolishness. Thus we see that this article meets with opposition on every side; even they who possess and believe the Word of God do not take it to heart as earnestly as they should.

If we desire to be true Christians it is necessary for us firmly to establish in our hearts through faith this article, that Christ, who bore our sins upon the cross and died in payment for them, arose again from the dead for our justification. The more firmly we believe this, the more will our hearts rejoice and be comforted. For it is impossible not to be glad when we see

Christ alive, a pure and beautiful being, who before, on account of our sins, was wretched and pitiable in death and in the grave. We are now convinced that our transgressions are removed and forever put away.

In the strength of this faith the early Christians composed and sang in Latin and German so charmingly and truly: "*Christ ist erfunden, von der Marter alle, deb follen wir alle froh fein, Christ will unter Trost fein;*" that is: Christ from all His sufferings has arisen, and will our solace be, hence we all should now rejoice. And again: *Agnus redemit oves, Christus innocens patri reconciliavit peccatores. Mors et vita duello conflixere mirando, dux vitae mortuus regnat vivus;*" that is: Christ the innocent Lamb has by His sacrifice purchased and redeemed us poor, lost sheep, and has through His innocence reconciled us to the Father. There was an amazing conflict between life and death; the Lord of life dieth, but having arisen now liveth and ruleth.

Whoever composed these old hymns must certainly have had a proper and Christian conception of the great event, else he could not have depicted so skillfully the scene when death assaulted life, and when the devil madly rushed against it. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ permitted Himself to be slain; yet death was much mistaken in his aim; for the life in this Person whom he attacked was eternal. Death was not aware of this, that an eternal and divine power was enclosed in the mortal body, and was vanquished in the tilt; he attacked Him who cannot die, though He did die on the cross. For as surely as the human nature in Christ was dead, His divine nature was incapable of death, though it was so concealed in Him during His passion and death, as our old teachers represent it, that it manifested itself in no wise, and this for the very purpose that Christ might die. Death did all that he could do; but since the Lord, according to His divine nature, is life itself, He could not remain dead, but freed Himself from death and ail his auxiliaries, vanquished sin and Satan, and now rules in a new life, exempt from all disturbance of sin, the devil, and death. This is indeed a strange, perplexing declaration: Christ, though He died, still liveth, and by His dying despoiled death of all his power. Reason cannot comprehend this; it is a matter of faith. But to us it is a source of great comfort to know and to believe that death has lost his reign, and that we owe this, praise be to God, to that One whom death attacks and overcomes as he does all mortals, but

whom he cannot hold; for, in the struggle ensuing, death himself perishes and is swallowed up, while Christ, who had died, lives and reigns forever.

St. Paul rejoices over this beautifully when he writes, Col. 2: “And you being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”

Two facts are here presented. He says, in the first place, that “Christ has with His own life blotted out the handwriting” which was against us according to the law. By this the Apostle means that we learn from the law what God demands of us, what we should do and what we should avoid. If now we trespass against the law, either by omitting to do what we ought to do, or by doing what we ought not to do, our conscience will accuse us of the wrong done. Thus our conscience becomes, as it were, a handwriting against us, in which we testify against ourselves as to our disobedience, and hence are subject to the wrath and punishment of God.

The law makes this “handwriting,” as St. Paul says; for if there were no law there would be no transgression. Thus we have against us, at the same time our sins and the handwriting, which convicts us of them, so that we must plead guilty; even as a merchant would have to acknowledge his own signature and seal. Here, the Apostle would say, we receive the assistance of Christ our Lord. He blots out our handwriting, “nailing it to the cross,” that is, He makes a hole through it and tears it to pieces, so that it can never again be used against us. To do this Christ was crucified; He bore our sins and paid our debts with His own life. This is what we have to notice first in the words of St. Paul above quoted.

In the second place he says: “Christ has spoiled principalities and powers,” that is, He despoiled the devil of his power, so that he can no longer urge and force Christians to sin, as was his custom to do ere they were converted to Christ. Now they are enabled, by the assistance of the Holy Ghost, to resist the wicked one, to defend themselves with the Gospel and faith, so as to repel him and thus have peace. Unto this end Christ sends us His Holy Spirit. In a similar manner are the “powers spoiled,” that is,

Christ has conquered death, whose power over us before was irresistible. Now the Christians have the weapons with which to conquer the devil and death; for these, though they rage and chafe, and bring all their might to bear against the Christians, will not succeed, as St. Paul says, Rom. 8: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

As Christ has conquered death, so has He also vanquished sin. In Himself He was just and free from sin, but inasmuch as He assumed the sins of others He became a sinner, as He laments, Psalm 49: "I said, Lord, be merciful, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against Thee." He prays thus because sin is upon Him. Nor does Christ seek to avoid this encounter with sin; He willingly goes into death upon the cross, as if He Himself had sinned and merited death, as Isaiah says: "He was numbered with the transgressors." And yet not He, but we, had sinned; He merely came to our rescue, and for our benefit took upon Himself our load of transgressions. But His holiness, though buried beneath the sins of others, is so great that sin cannot prevail against it. Thus sin and death are thwarted in their intentions; they encounter a too valiant adversary; death himself succumbs and is defeated in this struggle, as St. Paul declares.

The devil also made haste to assert his authority, and would fain bring Christ under his power; but he encounters a mightier One, whom he cannot conquer. For Christ, though much distressed by His sufferings and apparently overcome by the devil, is nevertheless strong and invincible. The devil was ignorant of this and loses all his power so that Christ can be said to have conquered at the time when Satan was sure of victory. Hence these three terrible foes, the devil, sin, and death, are now defeated and under the feet of Christ.

This glorious victory we celebrate today. Above all we must firmly believe that in Christ there was a contest between God and the devil, between righteousness and sin, between life and death, between that which is good and that which is evil, between purity and all manner of corruption, and that the triumph was on the side of God. This scene we ought to cherish fondly and earnestly, and often to contemplate.

In the former scene of suffering and death we witnessed our sin, our sentence of condemnation and death resting heavily upon Christ, making

Him a distressed, pitiable Man; now, on Easter, we have the other scene unalloyed with sin; no curse, no frown, no death is visible; it is all life, mercy, happiness and righteousness in Christ. This picture can and should cheer our hearts. We should regard it with no other feeling but that today God brings us also to life with Christ. We should firmly believe that as we see no sin nor death nor condemnation in Christ, so God will also, for Christ's sake, consider us free from these if we faithfully rely upon His Son and depend upon His resurrection. Such a blessing we derive from faith. The day will come, however, when faith shall be lost in sight and full fruition.

Nevertheless, while we are here on earth sin, death, disgrace and reproach, and all kinds of wants and infirmities remain with us, and we must patiently bear them. These all relate, however, only to the flesh; for in our faith we are already happy. As Christ arose from the dead, and has a life eternal, free from sin and death, so have we these treasures in faith. And as surely as the devil could not prevail against Christ, but had to flee, so surely will he also flee from the Christian who believes. In the end our body will also be perfected, so that neither sin nor death can have power over it. For the present we are as weak and sinful as other people, only that we strive to shun open and gross sins. It is true, Christians may also, now and then, be guilty of these, but they remain not in them; they flee them again through earnest repentance, and obtain through faith forgiveness of all their sins.

Hence it is impossible to judge a Christian aright by his external life and conduct. He may not be guilty of open, gross sins against conscience, yet he is not free from sins and infirmities. Therefore we must daily pray: "Forgive us our trespasses." On the other hand, it may be that heathens and unbelievers, in their outward walk and life, appear before the world just as good, yea, even better than the true children of God. To know and judge a Christian correctly, it is necessary to make his faith the criterion. As to our flesh and blood we are sinners, must die and suffer many evils upon earth, perhaps even more than others who have no faith, since Christians feel the burden of their sins and are troubled by them, while the others live in full security, undisturbed by their guilt.

How then can Christians claim to be holy and free from sin? By believing that in Christ, who died for their sins and arose again from the dead, they have forgiveness, upon which they rely and which they earnestly

seek in faith. Christians only can do this; for to believe the forgiveness of sins, and to seek it, is the work of the Holy Ghost.

Where the Holy Ghost is wanting, this faith is also absent. The enemies of the Gospel, the Pope and his crowd, are living examples; they are great and abominable sinners, but they know it not, nor do they ask forgiveness in faith. If, now and then, a conviction of their sins breaks in upon them, they know not what to do, they despair. That Christ arose from the dead, without sin, is an unknown story to them. A Christian, however, has comfort and happiness in Christ in proportion to the faith wherewith he contemplates this scene of the resurrection; he views Christ no longer bloody and wounded, but in all His beauty and loveliness. For as He formerly, on account of our sins, was bleeding and crucified, so He now has, for our consolation, an eternal life, full of happiness and joy. Let us therefore be glad and sing; all this has happened in our behalf.

These two facts then belong together: through faith in Christ we are pure and holy; on account of the old Adam within us we are impure and sinners. This impurity we remember when we pray: “Our Father . . . forgive us our trespasses,” and are comforted in the faith that God, for Christ’s sake and in the power of His resurrection, hears us and pardons us, and gives us eternal life. Thus we are holy in Christ through faith, even if we are sinners; for it matters not how much is yet lacking in us: Christ our Lord and Head arose from the dead; He has conquered sin and death, and we, through faith in Him, are also freed from their power. Whoever does not believe in this and has not Christ, will lie and remain under the dominion of sin, in spite of all his good works and religious observances.

Let us therefore earnestly view and study this joyful, lovely, and blessed Easter scene. It is a picture without sin and death. If sin troubles us, if our conscience accuses us of evil deeds and faithlessness, let us remember and exclaim: It is true, we are sinners, nor can we deny the weakness of our faith; but we console ourselves with the knowledge that Jesus Christ has taken upon Himself and borne our iniquities; and by His resurrection on this glorious Easter festival, sin and punishment threaten us no more. Say, devil, sin and death, why did you accuse this Man before Pilate and nail Him to the cross? Did you do right in this? And sin, and death, and the devil will then confess that a mistake was made – that they wrongfully abused Him. Then we can say to sin, death and the devil: Get you gone, molest us not!

But perhaps our timid hearts will object and ask: How dare we rely on this, – are we not sinners? Be sure then to reply: Yes, it is so; we are sinners; but that shall not cause us to doubt, since Christ is no sinner. He died and arose again from the dead for us, and the benefits of this are ours. If this does not satisfy you, settle it with Him; ask Him what He did with your sins; whether they were too heavy for Him, so that He could not bear them and had to lay them upon you again. He will surely be at ease who thus can turn the devil with his accusations to Christ, who silenced him before so completely.

This is the true doctrine concerning faith, which every one supposes himself to possess and to understand. There are, however, but few who know it aright; for it cannot be taught merely with words; the Holy Ghost must do it. If you have mastered this art, you are a Christian; but if you are imperfect in it, thank God that you belong to the number of those who love to hear of it, and do not revile it, as the Turks, Jews and Papists do, who imagine themselves so upright that they are perfectly justified in the sight of God, and need not this Easter narrative in their struggle with sin, death and the devil. Among them faith perishes entirely. May we learn utterly to disregard our own holiness, and to keep before our eyes only this Easter scene, Christ arisen from the dead, the Conqueror over death, sin and hell. If we thus look to Christ alone, and not to ourselves, just as our eyes do not look upon themselves while we are going forward, it will be well for us.

May our Lord Jesus Christ grant us this in mercy. Amen.

Second Easter Sermon. On The 28th Chapter Of St. Matthew.

We have already learned, my beloved, how and why the resurrection of Christ occurred, and what benefits we derive from it. Our Gospel exhibits to us this still further.

Above all we notice the important fact that the holy angels are the first messengers who bring the happy tidings that Christ has arisen and that the sepulchre is empty, reminding the women that Christ had foretold all this unto them, though they could then neither believe it nor understand it. Such a message is to us a plain assurance that the angels, who are pure and holy spirits, do neither despise nor shun us poor sinners, but rather desire to be our friends, since Christ died and arose again in our behalf.

If God had desired that we should neither hear of this resurrection nor enjoy it, He would not have sent from heaven the blessed angels, His messengers, to announce to us this great event. But now He sets apart and sends His angels to be unto us the first heralds of the resurrection of His Son; and in this we find an assurance that Christ, as we have seen, arose for us, and also that it is the pleasure of God that we should have full faith in this angelic message and be comforted thereby. This fact, the sending of the angels, is thus of great importance; from it we must conclude: The resurrection of Christ, as well as His passion, took place in our behalf, for our especial benefit.

Besides, we learn the full meaning of the resurrection of Christ from the language of the angels. They come with a twofold message, directed, first, to the women, that they should not fear, but rejoice that Christ had arisen, and then also containing the command not to conceal this, but to go in haste to the disciples with the announcement of the great event. In either import this message is full of cheer. The first words of the angel were: "Fear not

ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen as He said. Or, in other words: What strange and foolish people ye are to be astonished and afraid. Christ lives and is arisen from the dead, therefore ye ought to rejoice and not be troubled. We can interpret the language of the message in no other way; when one is told not to fear, he is encouraged and exhorted to be glad, hoping for the best, while he who fears can only anticipate some evil which he seeks to avoid. He who stands in dread of the hangman, of death, of sin, and of the wrath of God, can have no joy, no hope, but only lamentation and sorrow, care and sore distress. This shall no longer be your condition, the angel says, since Christ is risen: be ye comforted with this resurrection and strengthened against the devil, sin, death, and hell. If these enemies could still injure us, we of course would have to fear them. Therefore, the importance of this first command: be ye not afraid, which comes not only to those women, but to all baptized and believing Christians, who know and believe that Christ is risen indeed.

The other portion of this message is seemingly of less import, while really it has the same meaning as the former. When the angel urges the women to go quickly to announce the resurrection of Christ to His disciples, we have in this but another exhortation that they should rejoice and receive blessings from this event. Who, indeed, are these disciples? Poor sinners, who deserted their Lord in the time of His greatest misery, especially Peter, who even denied Him. Just then they were congregated together in secret, for fear of the Jews; they had not the least expectation of Christ's resurrection, or that He would shortly establish His kingdom; and even now, when the women come and tell that they had seen the Lord, when Simon Peter and those who had gone to Emmaus come and tell their story, none of the disciples would credit their report, regarding it as a fable. Yes, they are even weak and slow to believe when the Lord Himself appears in their midst, showing them His hands and feet, which He suffers them to feel and to touch.

The great anxiety of the angel to announce the resurrection of Christ to the disciples, who were nearly drowned in unbelief and tormented with an accusing conscience, is a certain indication that the Lord is arisen for the consolation of those who are weak in faith, or perhaps unbelieving, that they, in the end, might seek and find Him their help and defense.

If we, therefore, discover that we are afflicted with similar weaknesses, with sin and unbelief, we should not despair, nor suppose that Christ will not accept us, but should remember how, in behalf of such poor, weak and miserable sinners, the angels came from heaven and quickly dispatched the women to tell them that Christ was arisen, that thereby they might be comforted and rejoice. For, as we have already heard, the resurrection of Christ brings consolation, joy and a good conscience, since it banishes sin, death and the wrath of God from our sight.

Thus do the angels of heaven preach concerning the resurrection, that they might console, with this message, the poor, frightened consciences. Surely, we ought to be fully satisfied with such tidings. But in addition to this Christ Himself appears to the women and speaks to them as the angels did, greets them in the most friendly manner, and tells them not to fear. He thus instructs us all to improve aright the occasion of His resurrection, to expel all fear, and to rejoice with our whole heart, knowing that we have now no dead and buried Christ, who is to be honored at His tomb, as the women here proposed to do when they came to anoint His lifeless body, which would have been of no avail to Him nor of any consolation or benefit to themselves, but that we have a living Christ in whom we rejoice, and whose victory becomes our own through faith.

What now is there in all the world that could frighten a Christian who has Jesus for his Lord? Sin cannot do it, for we know that Christ has paid its debt; nor can it be death, since Christ has conquered him. Hell is rent asunder, and the devil is a prisoner and in chains. It matters not if the world, as she is wont to do, persecutes the Christians and torments them in every way; this is but a temporal suffering and can readily be endured if we know and believe that Christ arose for us and that now we have a life eternal. Let us, therefore, well learn and retain in memory the precious tidings of the angel: "Fear ye not, but be glad; praise God and give thanks unto Him; Christ is arisen and is no longer in the grave."

But this is not the only consoling assurance which we receive; Christ Himself makes it still greater and more glorious. He says: "Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me." Or, as St. John relates the occurrence in the 20. chapter, Christ told Mary: "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and unto your Father, and to my God, and to your God."

How consoling is this term brethren, which Christ here applies to His disciples. Among men this appellation is common, and means that one whom we call brother is a sharer with us of our heritage or of friendship. But when Christ, the Son of God, calls us brethren, the name becomes most excellent, most glorious, and of inexpressible value. If He calls us brethren, we thereby become also partakers of His heritage; for Christ surely does not make use of this name merely for appearance' sake, as men often do who address each other as "dear brother," while at the same time they are enemies at heart, and wish each other ill. When Christ calls us brethren He really means what the word implies, and declares that He will be our brother, and will regard us and deal with us in every respect as with brethren.

How did the Apostles merit such an honor? Did they perhaps earn this distinction when they shamefully deserted Him, when they denied Him and lost all confidence in His promise that He would live again and establish His kingdom? Such conduct would indeed have been a sufficient reason for the Lord to regard them as His enemies, and not as brethren. But, as already shown, Christ knows them to be sinners, and desires poor sinners to enjoy the benefits of His resurrection; else He would surely not have called His disciples brethren, who had by their timid and faithless conduct shown themselves so unworthy of this name. We also are indeed not worthy of this name, being such poor sinners, yet we are permitted to make use of it; yea, Christ teaches all Christians, when they pray, to say: "Our Father who art in heaven." If we call God in heaven our Father, then it follows that we are Christ's brethren, as He says in this connection: "I ascend unto my Father, and unto your Father, and to my God and to your God." There is this distinction however: Christ is in Himself the real and eternal Son of God, we on the other hand obtain this name through Christ, who died for us and arose from the dead that we, through faith in Him, might become children of God, *Filii adoptati non nati*; (children by adoption, not by birth,) as St. Paul describes the relation.

With the name brethren, which the Lord applies to His disciples, He really pronounces to them the absolution from all their sins, that they might forget them and be no longer troubled on their account. Christ has no sin; if then the disciples are His brethren, they must likewise be free from sin, else Christ would have an advantage over them in the heritage and would not

really be our brother; but now He says that we are His brethren, from which it follows that we are equal heirs with Him,

What is the inheritance of Christ? Neither money, nor goods, nor great power and temporal glory. Experience teaches that many, who are not children of God and not the brethren of Christ, have such earthly possessions; hence these cannot be the heritage of Christ, which He and His brethren alone possess. With these temporal gifts it is as with sunshine and rain and other earthly blessings; God bestows them equally upon the wicked and the just. The true heritage of Christ is that of which Paul speaks, 1 Cor. 1: "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

We poor mortals are so blinded by sin that of ourselves we know nothing of God, of His being and will, nor of sin and righteousness. And even though there is yet a small glimmer of the knowledge of God within us, as St. Paul writes Rom. 1, yet it is evident that this is easily quenched and that we readily fall into error and idolatry. The very first advantage of being an heir with Christ is a correct knowledge of God, as He says Matt. 11: "Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." This then is the greatest and highest wisdom, compared with which all worldly wisdom is utter foolishness. All human wisdom, though much honored among men, is only of short duration, but this knowledge of God in Christ, and of His grace and mercy toward us, is the true, eternal wisdom, yea, the life everlasting, as Christ says, and enables us not only to defend ourselves against men, but also to contend with the devil, and to know and to judge him aright.

The other portion of our heritage is that "Christ is made unto us righteousness." We not only live in sin, but are conceived and born therein; through Christ, however, this sin is not accounted unto us; God forgives us and pardons us for the sake of His Son. This is justification; God considers us righteous, though we, in ourselves, are poor, miserable sinners.

The third portion of our heritage is that "Christ is made unto us sanctification." This He is unto us not only by consecrating Himself as a sacrifice for us, as John 17. declares, but also by sending us His Holy Spirit, who assures our hearts of the mercy of God, and comforts and directs and

supports us in all times of sorrow and tribulation, also working in us a new life, resisting sin, and prompting to true obedience towards God.

The fourth portion of our heritage is that “Christ is made unto us redemption.” Let tribulations, sorrows, want, and persecutions come as they will, if Christ is only with us and defends us, they are harmless; we shall conquer in the end and have redemption from them all, not alone in this world, but also in eternity.

We should indeed earnestly long for such a precious, blessed and eternal heritage, and rejoice over it with our whole heart. This hope and privilege we have in Christ, since He calls us brethren. Alas, that we fritter away this joy; we are merrier if some one gives us a hundred dollars than when the Son of God makes us heirs of His kingdom and everlasting heritage. We would indeed have great reason to be satisfied if Christ but permitted us to be His disciples, His servants, His pupils, or if He called us His friends; for who could wish for a nobler Lord or a better Master. But He does much more than this, and elevates us to the loftiest position; He calls us “His brethren.” Let us, therefore, never forget the great consolation contained in this everlasting brotherhood; and may we in all distress, and in the bitter hour of death, derive all comfort from it.

To this the devil objects. He brings it about that the Pope and the false, delusive teachers say naught of this brotherhood, and make for themselves, in the devil’s name, other associations, where the good works, so called, of saints, of monks, and of priests are distributed as a heritage. But men deserve such delusion. If they will not rejoice and be comforted in the brotherhood of Christ, they fully deserve to go astray into other impious, idolatrous, false and worthless brotherhoods, in which they place their confidence and trust.

Let us, therefore, be grateful for the true doctrine and cordially receive it; let us make good use of the resurrection of Christ, coming unto Him as to our brother, in whom we have all confidence, fully believing that His life is the guarantee of our salvation and our defense from all wrath to come. If we were firm in this belief no misfortune could disturb us; for amid all suffering which may fall to our lot, we know that Christ liveth and that we shall live with Him. Why should the fact of our earthly sufferings distress us, when we are sure of eternal happiness in Christ; or why should we

entertain enmity toward those who abuse us? We ought rather to pity them, since by their hatred and envy toward us they clearly show that they are not of this brotherhood and can have no part in the eternal inheritance. What good will their earthly possessions do them, their influence, their money, their goods and renown, which they only misuse unto sin and everlasting condemnation?

If, therefore, we dearly loved this brotherhood in Christ, we would not be so eager after temporal things, but would care more for the eternal heritage which is secured to us in this brotherhood. St. Paul speaks very pertinently of this when, dwelling upon the resurrection of Christ, he says, Colossians 3. chapter: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." If we wish in truth to lay claim to this brotherhood and to boast that we are children of God, we must also strive to do our Father's will and to be obedient children. We must, as St. Paul says, "mortify our members which are upon earth," that is, we must restrain our evil desires and avoid evil deeds, and "put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another," etc. "We see, then, why sanctification was mentioned as a part of the heritage in Christ; it must surely follow, in faith and in life, as St. Paul also explains 1 Cor. 5:

"For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

And again: "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened." These words may seem strange, but they entirely correspond with the words of St. Paul which we have considered, that "Christ was made unto us righteousness and sanctification." If we believe that Christ paid for our sins, we have through such faith forgiveness of our sins and are justified, or as St. Paul calls it, "freed from the old leaven." Nevertheless, our flesh and blood is not totally mortified, but full of the old leaven and evil lusts; these we ought to purge out and mortify, cherishing them no more, but strive after sanctification. To this end Christ gives us His Holy Spirit, that we may resist sin and do the will of God.

From this you observe, my beloved, what effects the resurrection of Christ should have in us, namely, the banishing of our fear, the recognition of Christ as our Brother, and the joyful acceptance of the heritage which He has prepared for us. We ought also so to conduct ourselves that we may not, as undutiful children, lose this inheritance through our disobedience. In this manner will we rightly enjoy the glorious results of the resurrection and properly celebrate Easter.

Where this is not done, where people remain in sin and disobedience, or are too timid to lay hold upon this consolation in their woes and tribulations, there, surely this resurrection and glorious heritage will be of no avail.

May God grant us His Holy Spirit, through Christ Jesus, that our hearts may be cheered by this resurrection, that our faith and confidence and hope therein may increase from day to day, and that through it we may finally be saved. Amen

Third Easter Sermon. Luke 24:36-47.

And as they thus spake, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And He saith unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when He had thus spoken, He shewed them His hands and His feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and of a honeycomb. And He took it, and did eat before them. And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and saith unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

The incidents of our text also occurred on Easter, when the two disciples had returned from Emmaus to Jerusalem, and had narrated to the others what had happened to them and told them that they had seen the Lord. They are in fact the same which John relates, and which form the text for next Sunday, making no mention, however, of Thomas and his experience, which occurred eight days later and is presented to our consideration by the lesson of the following Sunday. Our text, which contains much important matter, might be considered under various heads, but inasmuch as we have already dwelt upon the resurrection itself, we will now confine our

discourse to two main points presented by our lesson. First we notice the fact that the disciples, when Christ, the doors being locked, unexpectedly appeared before them, were terrified and supposed they saw a spirit.

From this we learn that the appearance of spirits is nothing new. The Lord Himself does not deny the possibility of such manifestations, but rather confirms the belief in them when He points out the difference between Himself and spirits. He says: "Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones."

From this we learn the important and salutary lesson that we are very much mistaken, when we think ourselves alone and the devil hundreds of miles removed from us. He is constantly about us, and sometimes assumes strange masks. I myself have seen him in the form of a pig, of a bundle of burning straw, and in similar disguises. One must know this, lest we become superstitious and think that the spirits which appear are the souls of dead men, as it has been formerly customary to believe. This superstitious belief has been of great advantage to the popish mass and has given it greater importance. Whenever the devil appeared, or made himself heard, people thought that the spirits of the dead were manifesting themselves, as is clearly seen from the writings of popish authors, and even from those of Gregory and other ancient teachers, who regarded such appearances not as spooks of the devil, but as manifestations of the spirits of the dead, even of those who died in faith. We all know, alas, but too well what deplorable, horrible errors and superstitions resulted from this fancy.

Purgatory was supported by this belief, and out of the dream of purgatory grew the doctrine concerning works of supererogation and their benefits to the dead. It is self-evident that the death and resurrection of Christ was lost out of sight by such false doctrines, and that the works of men were glorified instead. Another result was the abomination of the mass, whereby the sacrifice of Christ was set aside and the Lord's Supper shockingly abused; for it was regarded as instituted for the dead and not for the living. Such misery resulted from the superstitious belief that the souls of the departed had reappeared; when it really was the devil who exhibited himself under various disguises in various places. The people were duped by this devilry, else they would have had no confidence in the manifestations of spirits; for the devil is known to be a murderer and a liar,

so that Christ would not accept his testimony even when he spoke the truth, as we see from the first chapter of St. Mark and from other similar passages.

We assert, therefore, the great importance of knowing and believing that the devil really does appear among us in various shapes and forms. Likewise do the holy angels, so that we are constantly surrounded by them and by devils. The latter are ever on the alert to injure, to seduce and to destroy us, while the good angels hover around us, if we are pious and walk in the fear of God, to protect us from evil and from harm. This we should know, that we may learn to fear God, to pray more fervently day by day, and to trust in Him alone, and implore His protection against the evil spirits, so that they may not harm us with pestilence, nor endanger us with poisons, nor overwhelm us with other afflictions.

The surest and best method of escaping these attacks is to live in the fear of God, to be earnest in prayer, and to love His holy Word. This is the true charm with which we can make ourselves secure from the attacks of the enemy. In that heart, in which the Word of God has its home, the devil cannot abide; he will trot off speedily. Thus the devil cannot make his home in the Church if Christ is there, and Christ has said: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there will I be in the midst of them;" hence we say that the devil must vanish when Christ comes. It behooves us, therefore, to hear God's Word willingly, to meditate upon it and to converse about it often and gladly. But where falsehoods, slanders and other sins prevail and the conscience is violated, there Christ and His angels depart. Let no one then gainsay the fact that the devil appears, that he terrifies and seduces men, and that he injures them secretly wherever he can. Let us rather learn to resist this demon with the holy cross, not with that alone which we make with the motions of the hand, but with that which we have in our heart by faith, which finds all consolation in the Word of God, and let earnest prayer not be forgotten. Then it matters not how much the devil clatters and spooks around; we are safe from him. Tell him boldly to his face: Thou art a devil and wilt remain such, but I am a Christian and have a Protector mightier than thou; therefore avaunt and disturb me not.

The devil has more than once attempted to frighten me in my own house by making a clatter, but he scared me not in the least; for I stood upon my authority and told him: See here, I know that God placed me in this house

and made me master over it; now if thou hast a better claim to the mastery here than I, then stay; but thou hast no business here; I tell thee thou belongest somewhere else, even to the infernal abyss of hell. Then I went to sleep again, and left him to his rage; for I was assured he could do me no harm. This is the first consideration presented to us by our text, which we could not pass by in silence; for the disciples and the Lord Himself speak of spirits that are evil, and which appear for no other purpose than to frighten people and to make them timid.

We come now to the other part of our meditation, in which we shall consider the words of Christ: "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

He says: This preaching, that Christ must die and rise again from the dead, shall begin at Jerusalem, and thence shall spread throughout the whole world, so that in His name, and in that alone, repentance and remission of sins shall be proclaimed. No repentance nor any remission of sins, if dependent upon any other name, even if it be that of St. Peter or of St. Paul, and least of all if it be my own name, is of any account. Why then should I become a monk, with the intention of doing good works whereby I might merit forgiveness of sins?

Our text tells us that Christ, by His death and resurrection, obtained for us forgiveness of sins, which "is preached in His name," and that he who desires to be benefited thereby must believe that Christ died for him and arose again from the dead. This is the preaching to which the text exhorts.

To prevent the impression as if this preaching could be fully understood and comprehended at once in all its bearings, the Evangelist purposely adds these words: "Then opened He," namely the Lord Himself, "their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures." This is necessary, or people will go to Church and return with as little knowledge of what they heard as cows would have if they had been there. If Christ does not first open the understanding all is dark; it cannot be otherwise.

But what does the Lord mean when He speaks at the same time of "repentance and remission of sins" as intimately connected, and when He states that "this preaching shall begin at Jerusalem?" Is this not a perverse

order, to begin the preaching of repentance and remission of sins at Jerusalem, where the greatest saints are dwelling, the Levites, the high priests and the people of God? Everybody is under the impression that this city has no need whatever of the preaching of repentance and of the remission of sins.

These words of the Lord, however, have this meaning: Ye Levites and Jews shall be the first to whom repentance and remission of sins shall be preached, that you may amend your evil ways; if you heed not this preaching, you will nevermore obtain remission of your sins. To preach repentance is nothing else than to announce to the people that they are miserable sinners and liable to damnation, and that it is impossible for them to be saved without conversion and complete change.

It is the Lord's will that such preaching shall be heard throughout the whole world, so that no one might plead ignorance in this, but that all should know and confess that they are sinners. What other advantage could accrue from the preaching of repentance? Yea, thus it must be, in accordance with the Lord's will, that this preaching must begin at Jerusalem, among the chosen people of God, at the holiest place. The Pharisees shall hear the summons to repentance, for they are worse in the sight of God than harlots and reprobates, since they regard themselves good and holy, and not in need of the preaching which calls to repentance.

In short, Christ, with the words under consideration, condemns the entire world and calls all men sinners, and desires of us, if we wish to be saved at all, to fall upon our knees and to exclaim with uplifted hands: Lord, I am a sinner; I need conversion, that I may become better; but inasmuch as I cannot bring this about by myself, be Thou my help, O Lord, and let Thy mercy be upon me.

If we are thus minded, and have no confidence at all in our own exertions and life, then we will realize what is meant by that other expression: remission of sins. The Lord commands that this also shall be preached. First, and chiefly, we must know that we are sinners, and then cry for mercy. If one wishes to become a Christian, he must first of all take this step and confess himself a sinner, having learned to know what sin is; then the pardon of sin, with all its cheer and consolation, can be appropriated. These words of Christ convey, therefore, these two facts to us: that the

whole world is steeped in sin, and that it can only be made just and holy through Himself, the Saviour of all.

Man's thoughts are different. One supposes himself pleasing unto God because he chastens his body much and prays often; another, because he has bestowed many alms, and so on. But the Gospel calls all men sinners and tells them: Repent. This causes contradiction; the Pope refuses to acknowledge himself a sinner, as also does the monk in his cloister. In fact, we all are averse to this confession and strive to palm ourselves off as unblameable; but in this endeavor we can never succeed,

What then shall we do? Shall we despair because we are sinners and because God is an enemy to sin? No, for Christ gave the command to preach not only repentance, but also the remission of sins, which should be unto all those who believe in His name. We remember this and are comforted. We say: O Lord, we are great offenders; but spare us for Thy mercy's sake, for we have no merits of our own. If we do this, relief is at hand; for we have the promise of God that the sins of all who accept the Gospel shall be forgiven. This is surely the meaning of Christ's command to preach remission of sins in His name. Without Christ there is no remission.

Thus it is evident that the sale of indulgences by the Pope is a lie and a cheat. He sells them in the name and in behalf of the merits of departed saints, while Christ positively declares: "In my name shall remission be preached;" no one else but I died for you, or rose again from the dead that you might live.

This preaching is called heresy by our enemies, as you are aware, and we are basely charged with forbidding good works. Well, let them slander. We did not first use this language, nor did we invent the doctrine that in the name of Jesus repentance shall be preached unto all nations. But, I ask, if our own good works could suffice, why yet preach repentance? The righteous need no such preaching, but the sinners do. The command of Christ, however, is a general one; He says: Preach repentance to the whole world; from which it follows that all are sinners, and that sin alone, and no good works, are to be found throughout the earth. Hence we see the necessity of preaching repentance and remission of sins.

But the perverse adversaries will not heed this, and continue their slander that we forbid good works. May God therefore enlighten our

understanding and enable us earnestly to say: O Lord, have mercy upon us poor wretched sinners; grant that we may comfort ourselves with Thy promise of remission of sins, which Thou hast ordered to be preached in Thy name. Whoever makes such a confession gives God the praise by recognizing His Word as truth, which accuses us all of sin and demands repentance. But he also gives God the praise by believing the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus. The impenitent and unbelieving, on the contrary, blaspheme God, and in the end receive their punishment.

Thus we can become just before God. Then we should proclaim the Gospel also unto others, do good to them and help them, be obedient, and attend to the duties of our calling. In this wise we can become true saints, holy before God through faith, and then also unblameable before men in our life. The person must first be made pure and acceptable through faith, else what would all good works avail? Surely it would be absurd to call any deed good when the source from which it comes is bad and impure. The heart discredits the truthfulness of God, who orders the preaching of repentance throughout the whole world, and since it refuses to acknowledge itself corrupted by sin, it cannot accept the forgiveness which is preached, and is not benefited thereby.

They who confess themselves sinners, and believe that God for Christ's sake pardons them, are true Christians, in whom there is repentance and remission of sins. Because we teach thus, we are termed heretics and called accursed. But that matters naught. We rejoice that by the mercy of God we have the true doctrine, that we know ourselves to be sinners and can appropriate the consolation of God's Word. In this faith we are enabled to do truly good works, which are performed in repentance and faith. Where this doctrine and preaching has a home, there Christ is; no devil can rule there, nor need his manifestations be feared. Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is a happy peaceful heart, prepared to do the Lord's will.

The others who are void of faith can do no good work; and whatever they do, though it be in itself not bad, they do reluctantly and without pleasure. Such works are cheerless and disagreeable, and God cannot be pleased with them. The heart becomes cheerful only through faith in Christ, which accepts the truth that we are sinners, but also embraces the promise of the gracious remission of sins.

A Christian is therefore both a sinner and a saint; he is evil and is good. In ourselves we are sinners, but Christ gives us another name when He mercifully forgives our sins for His sake. Hence both appellations are true. Sins are yet in us, for the old Adam still lives within; and again they are not present, because God blots them out for Christ's sake. They are present before my eyes; I see them and I feel them; but there stands Christ and tells me to repent, to confess myself just what I am, a sinner, and declares unto me forgiveness of my sins through faith in His name.

Repentance alone, though necessary, is not sufficient; faith in the remission of sins through Christ must also be added. Where there is such faith, God no longer sees sin; for then we appear before Him not in our own righteousness, but in that of Christ. He adorns us with grace and righteousness even if, in our own eyes, we are miserable sinners, full of weakness and unbelief. But this conviction of our own wickedness shall not drive us to despair, else we could not heed the preaching of repentance. No, we come and say: Lord, we are damnable sinners, but Thou declarest that we shall not remain such, and hast commanded remission of sins to be preached at all times in Thy name.

This is the faith that makes Christians. If you kill yourself by fasting, if you beggar yourself by giving alms, you will gain nothing by it; such conduct will make no Christian of you, nor can you thus earn heaven or appease God. Here we read: "In my name should repentance and remission of sins be preached." Christ says: Tell the people of their sins, and of God's wrath on that account; but tell them also of this remission for their consolation. Christ Jesus alone is our robe of righteousness and our salvation; if we are clothed therein, God is our Father, a merciful God, who condemns us not as sinners, but adjudges us righteous, holy and acceptable, and gives us eternal life.

You well know that this glorious doctrine was not taught before the Gospel of salvation was again preached. The words of the text, that forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ should be preached, indeed remained, but they were not impressed upon the people's minds; doctrine and practice were totally opposed to them, so that he who desired to be saved was taught to do good works, so called, and to pay his debt of sins by his own endeavors. What else was this but to remove sin in man's own name? But such procedure is wrong and useless. The name of Christ, and

that alone, brings remission, and therefore this name must be preached. Not fasting nor giving of alms, not becoming monks or nuns, neither the Pope, not even Peter and Paul, nor the Virgin Mary, can aid us at all in this. Only in the name of Christ remission of sin is to be preached.

From this we learn how pitiable the Papists are, and how miserably they are swindled. When they confess their sins and fain would be very pious, believing themselves absolved from all their sins, they have no remission nor absolution in the name of Jesus, as it should be, but only in the name of the holy Virgin, of the Apostles, or in the merits of the other saints. This is a sham absolution, an abomination to be shunned as the very devil himself. And yet, to increase this horror, people are forced to this practice, as if it were the most glorious service of God. The command of Christ is not thus; He says in our text, remission of sins shall be preached in the name of Jesus, and in none other. Not one of the saints died for our sins; what need then have we of their name to obtain remission of sins?

This doctrine we learn from the Gospel before us, that they who confess their sins and know that they are sinners shall obtain forgiveness in the name of Christ. This method of getting rid of our guilt seems very easy. To accomplish this it is not necessary to carry stones, to build churches, to read mass, but only to hear God's Word, and to praise Him when He has repentance preached unto us, confessing ourselves the guilty ones and then trusting implicitly in His mercy, relying fully upon the name of Jesus, in whom remission is preached. Where such faith exists, sin can do no harm; Jesus is there with the power of His name, and that makes just. We are therefore secure, not because we have done no wrong, but because for Christ's sake we are accounted of God holy and justified. This we also confess in our Creed: I believe the forgiveness of sins. For such mercy we should be thankful to God, who has given us the Gospel and brought us into the kingdom of Christ; for this is a kingdom of grace, in which all sins are remitted in the name of Jesus.

This doctrine of the remission of sins must be clearly understood and kept apart from that which concerns good works. We do not say that they who desire salvation shall not do good works; for this obligation has been imposed long ago in the law; but we do urge that such good works have nothing at all to do with the forgiveness of sins. Peter and Paul, and all the saints, may have been ever so upright in their daily walk, but this availed

them nothing before God; they would not thereby have been justified; only their faith in Christ, that through His death they had forgiveness of sins and eternal life, availed them. We must do good works; but notwithstanding this we must believe the forgiveness of sins only in the name of Christ.

Grant us this consummation, Jesus, our Lord and our Saviour. Amen.

First Sunday After Easter. (Quasimodogeniti.) John 20:19- 31.

Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the Week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and said unto them, Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, He shewed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained. But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe. And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto Him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.

Our text recounts the same incident of which mention is made in the previous sermon for Easter. It occurred after the return of the two disciples from Emmaus to Jerusalem, where they told their brethren that they had seen the Lord. In our text, however, we have a fuller account of this occurrence; for St. John differs in his descriptions from the other Evangelists in this, that he not only narrates the incidents, but also adds the sayings, the words of Christ, which are indeed of chief importance. According to this his custom, he recounts in our text the words not found in the other Evangelists, which were spoken by the Lord after He had greeted His disciples and had shown them His hands and feet: “As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”

These are most precious words, by which Christ invests the disciples with the office of preaching, making arrangements for the application of the glorious results of His sufferings and resurrection. For if this great occurrence had not been preached in its various bearings, if it had remained a mere historical event, it would have been of no avail for us. This we learn from the condition of the Papists. They are acquainted with the event and its record as well as we, but they do not preach it as Christ directs; hence their mere historical knowledge of it benefits them no more than if it were the story of Dietrich of Bern, which one hears and learns; they have simply the recollection of the occurrence. It is therefore absolutely necessary to make a proper use of the narrative of Christ’s sufferings and resurrection.

How to do this we learn from the words of the Lord Himself when He says: “As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.” And how the Father sent Christ was described long ago by the prophet Isaiah in the 61. chapter, where it reads: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” With such instructions Christ was sent, and now declares that in no other way will He send His disciples. He entrusts to them the office of preaching, that it may remain in force even to the end of time, and He orders them to preach just as He preached while in the flesh. This command then, and this mission to preach, has reference only to the doctrine to be taught; the disciples are instructed to preach no other doctrine than that which Christ Himself proclaimed.

The character of this doctrine is clearly and beautifully expressed by the prophet Isaiah when he describes Christ as anointed, and sent to cheer the downcast and the timid, to comfort the brokenhearted. All other preaching is erroneous and surely not as Christ enjoined; it is Mosaic in its nature. Moses preached in such a style that the fearful, timorous hearts were yet more affrighted and became still more disconsolate; the preaching of Christ, however, aims to comfort the distressed. His teaching was new, as the works which He accomplished, the like of which the world had never witnessed before, were new, namely, that the Son of God suffered, died and arose again. Christ here fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah; for thus we read in the words of our text: "He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained!"

Here we have the right definition of the powers of the spiritual kingdom, which is as far removed from the nature of the governments of this world as the heavens are from the earth. They who execute the authority of this spiritual kingdom are true kings, real potentates and mighty rulers. But their government is not absolute; we learn from our text how it is limited. It extends, indeed, over the entire world, as the words clearly indicate, yet it is confined in its operations to the sins of men. It has nothing to do with money or lands, with food or raiment, nor with anything pertaining to the outward life of man. Such affairs are regulated by emperors, kings, princes and other officers chosen for this purpose, whose duty it is to administer the secular governments, that men may live in prosperity and peace. The spiritual government concerns itself with the spiritual necessities of men, with their sins; where these are found, there this authority exercises its sway, and nowhere else.

It is a great mistake to mix these duties and powers, as the Pope and his bishops have done, who abused their spiritual authority and became lords of this world, even to such an extent that emperors and kings had to bow before them. Christ did not invest His disciples with any such authority; He did not ordain them to the administration of temporal governments, but to the office of preaching, thereby giving them authority over sin. The functions of the office of the ministry are therefore these: To preach the Gospel of Christ and to forgive sins to the penitent, desponding souls, but, on the other hand, to retain them to the impenitent and unbelieving.

This authority over sin has been miserably abused by the Pope; for by it he regarded himself privileged to make laws and regulations as he pleased, not only for the Church, but also for the whole world, and thus did not at all regard the proper duties pertaining to the Office of the Keys. In this he greatly erred. It is not my duty as a preacher of the Gospel, as a messenger of Christ, to instruct you in your business affairs, in agriculture, in matrimony, or other similar transactions; God gave you your reason to guide you in all such matters. And if you should be in doubt as to this or that in regard to these things, you can go and ask advice of jurists, and other people, who are well versed in such affairs. My duty and office relates to your spiritual condition; I must tell you that you are a sinner, and that you would be eternally damned as such if Christ had not paid your debt and become your Saviour.

To understand this duty well it is simply necessary to know what sin is. "Sin" is not gold nor other similar possessions, not worldly authority, not our daily labor, not bread nor wine, nor anything of this kind, but it is a heavy burden which oppresses the heart and conscience before God, so that we are afraid of His wrath and await eternal damnation. We speak here of real sins, which God adjudges as such and which bring death, and not of those imaginary sins which the Pope and his jugglers, the bishops, have invented, such as the omission of fasting on certain days, the eating of meat, or the careless handling of certain monastic trappings. These are papistic sins, invented and ordained by priest-craft, but before God they are not sins, nor do they bring condemnation, for He gave no commandments relating to these matters. When we speak of sins in this connection we mean real sins, actual transgressions of the law both human and divine, sins not designated as such by men, but by the Word of God, sins in which we are born and in which we live. With sins of this kind the apostles are here enjoined by Christ Himself to busy themselves, either to forgive them or to retain them by virtue of their office; but in other matters, temporal in their nature, they should not interfere. Every apostle, and every minister of the Gospel, is authorized to proclaim unto the sinners who will not repent and are obstinately wicked, that they are in the clutches of the devil and will be surely thrust into the jaws of hell; on the other hand, it is equally a part of their office to assure the penitent and believers that, because of the sufferings and resurrection of Christ, heaven and eternal life will be theirs. This authority and power rests in the Word of God, not in the person of

those who preach it; hence their decision is valid, is acknowledged as such even by the devil, and will surely free from sin those who accept it in true faith.

This privilege and authority which the apostles have, yea, which every Christian has, to pronounce judgment respecting sin, is of such vast importance that all the powers of emperors and kings are as nothing compared with it. For this declaration is as powerful and sure as if Christ Himself proclaimed it; for thus He says: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

Thus we see how the power of the Church and her authority are only to be employed in relation to sin; they meddle not with matters of State, with temporal concerns, but address themselves to the fears and burdens of the conscience, which accuses and convicts before God. Again we learn from this, how carefully we should guard against treating certain things as sinful in which there is no transgression; for if we do, we are, as I have said above, guilty of inventing sins which are spurious, and the result would be that, in order to escape their imagined horrors, we would seek refuge in a righteousness which is also a sham and spurious. Let us therefore understand this well: sin is the transgression of the law of God and accuses mightily. A failure to comply with popish whims and regulations is not sin; God does not regard it as such.

But, alas, it is only too evident how many people live in actual, great and open sins, in avarice, adultery, theft, usury, anger, envy, drunkenness, blasphemy, and the like. They are hardened in their sins and perfectly indifferent. There is no lack of sins, but there is a lack of their acknowledgment and of repentance. Here then there can be no application of the authority to release; here it is necessary to bind. This power is mentioned in the words: "And whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."

It behooves us therefore to make a correct distinction in regard to sin. Some sins are such both in the sight of God and in our own sight. Some sins, however, are such only before God, not in our eyes, that is, we are ignorant of them, and therefore do not concern ourselves about their remission.

David says: *Tibi peccavi*, “Lord I have sinned before Thee and have done evil in Thy sight.” In these words he confesses his wrong and the conviction that it is displeasing in the sight of God. He says in fact: I see and feel my sin, not only in thought, but in my experience of its dreadful power; it is a terrible burden, the very devil himself, who comes to accuse me before God and to drag me away into hell and everlasting death. St. Paul, Rom. 7, speaks thus of this condition: “For without the law sin was dead, for I was alive without the law once,” that is, sin is ever within us, but without the coming of the law it does not disturb us, we are at ease as to the consequences. Hence we continue upon the path of evil, committing sin upon sin, without any fear of God or thought of amendment.

But as soon as the thunder of the law penetrates the heart, the conscience is aroused and becomes aware of sin; then we realize what a horrible, destructive power sin is, how it robs us of God and hands us over to the devil and consigns us to hell. Hence the apostle continues: “But when the commandment came sin revived, and I died, and the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.”

This is the true sin, which is such both before God and in our own sight. Thus David, after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, was at first careless as to the sin of which he was guilty; it slept, yea it was yet dead. But when Nathan came and thundered into his heart the words: “Thou art the man who art guilty of death before God,” sin began to revive in David’s soul. Nathan however comforts him with the promise: “Thou shalt not die.”

Thus we see how the authority of the apostles is not applied in worldly affairs, which merely pertain to the outward life of man, nor only to such transgressions as the civil government judges and punishes, but that it exerts its power over sin, which is regarded and held as such by God and man. Yea, the sins of the whole world are thus under the control of the apostles and of all ministers of the Gospel, even of every Christian in case of necessity; so that we can be fully assured of the forgiveness of our sins when our pastor, or, in case of his absence, when any Christian declares it unto us in the name of Jesus Christ. Such a declaration will be as valid as if Christ were personally present to pronounce it, or had sent an angel from heaven to proclaim it unto us.

Such authority and power is however not given to the apostles and ministers that they on that account should be overbearing and proud. It is not their own power which they exercise; they are simply servants of God to bring help to their fellowmen, to rescue them from the mighty thralldom of the enemy of their souls' salvation. It is a great and glorious achievement when a man, himself a poor, miserable sinner, exercises this power and puts to flight an enemy so strong that otherwise the whole world combined could not rout him. Christ says: "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them," and again: "Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Since then these words: "As my Father, hath sent me, even so send I you," are so plain, no one should doubt that his sins are really forgiven as soon as the absolution is pronounced.

For this reason we so frequently exhort you to apply these glorious gifts which Christ has left to His Church and never to despise them. Christ has instituted the office of the ministry to battle against sin and to remit it wherever it really exists and is confessed in true faith. With those so-called sins, invented by men, we have here nothing to do; we mean sins which are such and which move the heart with terror.

Adam preaches the same doctrine to his son Cain, in Genesis, where he tells him: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." Thou art a sinner, but art not aware of it: sin, as it were, slumbers, but in a very unquiet place; if it is aroused thy condition will be greatly changed. Sin, though dormant now, will not sleep on forever; it will awake and torment thy conscience with terrible stings, driving thee to despair. Those persons who do not concern themselves about sin are sinners indeed, but they cannot be absolved; their sins will be retained, for they desire no remission and prefer to continue in their evil ways.

The doctrine of the papists in this regard was: Let him who desires forgiveness meditate upon his sins and be penitent. On this penitence they then based the remission of sins. It is possible that this practice arose from an imitation of the example of the fathers, who insisted upon it, just as we now do, that whosoever wished to be absolved must first be truly penitent and ready to confess his sins. This is right, and just as it should be; but it is entirely false when such penitence is regarded as meriting forgiveness, when it is made the ground of the remission of sins. Penitence has no

merits; it is simply a realization of the enormity and power of sin, which makes itself felt in the heart. Hence it is wrong to trust in penitence, as if it were sufficient to bring remission of sins.

Previous to this penitence there is no account made of sin. It is indeed present, but man is dead to it; it sleeps; it is sin deprived of vitality, as Adam tells Cain in the words quoted above. But when sin revives and makes itself felt, it disturbs the heart and conscience; yet we cannot call these manifestations a meritorious work; it is simply, as St. Paul calls it, living sin. And surely, it would be foolish to assert that sin can merit grace.

The people under the papacy were therefore greatly deceived when absolution was given them on account of their penitence, as being some merit or good work. All the papal bulls conveying forgiveness of sins are directed to the "*contritis et confessis*," to the penitent and those who have made a confession. Penitence, if real, is nothing but sin acknowledged, and surely there is no merit in this. We have remission of our sins when we have faith in the words of Christ, and accept implicitly the declaration made in His name, that our sins are forgiven, not on account of our penitence, which is only sin experienced and confessed, and on which we can build no hope of remission, but on account of the Word of Christ, in which we trust.

Mere penitence, or feeling sin, has the effect to drive us away from faith and from God, of whom we are afraid. This makes sin more terrible and more effective, and causes in the end agony and despair, which is but a multiplication of sins. The thief, who has fallen into the hands of the executioner, increases his crimes by adding to his theft a revengeful feeling against those in authority and against God. St. Paul speaks pertinently of this, Rom. 7, when he says: "Sin by the commandment becomes exceeding sinful," that is, sin becomes strong and overwhelming in its effects. This they called penitence, when to one sin many others were added, so that the whole world is filled with sins, and peace and rest are nowhere to be found. Where the heart is in such a condition as this, despair must follow. Judas the betrayer had such penitence as this. Christ, with His cheering word and command respecting the remission of sins, must also be present, else all is dark and hopeless.

Where there is penitence and fear, Christ approaches and says: Thou art full of sins, and in misery turnest away from me; I cannot absolve thee on

this account. Penitence and sorrow are necessary, for without them there can be no sincere hatred of sin and no longing desire to be freed from it; but do not confine thyself to this lamentation; come to me, hear and accept my word in true faith, and thou shalt have remission of sins.

This indeed was not the style of preaching among the papists; they sent the penitent to St. James, to Rome, or other sacred places, telling them to trust in their penitence and to do good works. The word and commandment of Christ in reference to the remission of sins was entirely disregarded by them. But this command stands here immovable: “Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.” This is plain enough. Nowhere else but in the words of Christ our Saviour can we find forgiveness of our sins. Go for this purpose where ever else you please, you will surely go amiss. What did we gain by it when we tortured ourselves with fasting, singing, prayer, vigils, reading mass, and the like? Were our sins remitted on that account? Surely not. Is it not a shame and an abomination that we were taught to seek remission of sins by means of penitence, which by itself is only sin aggravated? If my works, my penitence and confessions can do it, of what value is the word of Christ, and what need is there of His command in regard to the remission of sins? We might as well be Jews and Turks, who also desire to be saved, though they reject Christ. The Pope is really worse than the Turk and Jews, because he abuses the name of Christ in teaching his false doctrine.

We ought ever to remember that Christ makes remission of sins dependent upon His Word, and not upon pilgrimages, masses, alms or other so called good works, of whatever kind they may be. Whoever now desires remission of sins, let him go to his minister or to some other fellow Christian who has God’s Word, and he will surely find consolation there. It is certain that by no exertions of our own can we overcome sin, and everything we do, even if we torture ourselves to death, will be in vain. This was often experienced in popery. When one was troubled in his conscience and went into a monastery, or performed some other penitential work, for the purpose of earning peace and happiness, he had to confess that neither cowl, nor rosaries, nor fasting, nor other penances, could in the least remove his misery or ease his conscience.

We know the reason of this failure. Christ tells us in our text that sins are remitted or retained through His Word. He whose sins are not remitted by

this Word, because he hears it not, has them retained by the same Word; for this is the only means whereby sins are effectually dealt with. You may therefore do what you please, your sins will be retained if you depend on your own works and despise these words of Christ. The Lord our God made forgiveness of sins contingent on no work that we might perform, but on the great work which Christ accomplished when He died for the world, and for our benefit arose from the dead. The application of this His work He makes through the Word which He entrusted to the apostles, to the ministers of the Gospel, yea, to every Christian, authorizing them to declare unto all who seek it the remission of sins.

Thus we have pointed out to us the only way in which we can surely find remission of sins. The command has been issued long ago to remit sins, and in the Word we are sure to find this remission. If we seek it not there, our sins will be retained, do what we may; for, as has been repeatedly said, there is no remission except in the Word of Christ. This Word, however, has been entrusted to the apostles and all Christians, and they are to apply it; he who seeks any other remedy for the ills of sin, shall not find it, no matter what he may do to accomplish that end. This divine declaration, that sin is removed by the Word alone, without the assistance of any works, stands firmly fixed; it must be heeded by us, or we have no remission.

This, however, has not only reference to absolution, but, as we mentioned already in the beginning of our sermon, to all the functions of the holy ministry. Christ declares in the words of our text that remission of sins shall be proclaimed and imparted by the preaching of the Word and by the holy Sacraments. The object of preaching the Gospel is to bring men to a knowledge of their sins, that they may become pious and just. We are baptized that through the death of our Lord our sins may be forgiven, and Christ has instituted His Supper that we may truly believe that His body was sacrificed for us and that His blood was shed in our behalf and therefore have no doubts of the remission of our sins. To strengthen our faith in this forgiveness of sins, Christ so ordained it that each one must receive the Sacraments for himself; it will not answer to baptize one for many, nor to administer the Lord's Supper to one as the representative of others; each one must himself enjoy these blessings. In like manner each one must for himself hear the Word and seek absolution, if he desires to be comforted thereby. Let no one doubt, when the declaration of remission of

sin in Jesus' name is pronounced, that it is true and that all his sins are removed, yea that he is released from them also in heaven and in the sight of God.

The Word and the Sacraments therefore belong together; for Christ has included the Sacraments in the Word. Without the Word we could not be comforted by the Sacraments; we would not even know what they are. It is consequently not only a great blindness and error, but also a terrible abuse, when the papists preach remission of sins regardless of the Word upon which all depends, and delude people by directing them to seek absolution through penances and works of their own.

But, because the remission of sins is communicated through the Word, which, as has been frequently said, was entrusted by our Lord to the Church and her ministers, yea, unto all Christians, that it should be preached, it follows that this remission of sin must be believed, and that there is no way of obtaining it, except by faith. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is the very foundation of our creed. The word of Christ, which He gave to His disciples, can certainly not be seized with the hands nor by any self-imposed works, such as fasting, prayers, giving of alms and the like; faith alone can appropriate it, and the heart alone is the proper receptacle for it. It is evident and certain that we are justified only through faith, because remission of sins comes through the Word, and the Word can be received only by faith.

Of this the Pope and his party are ignorant; yea, they are so hardened that they refuse to learn it. They have put aside both faith and the Word, and have told the people to depend on their own works, on their piety and merits. Would that God might silence these fellows with their false doctrines. It behooves us, however, to remember this papistic doctrine with all its horrors, and to compare it with the true doctrine which we preach, else we are in danger of falling again into error, and of again seeking remission of sins by our own works. Christ directs us to His Word and away from our works; He makes His Word powerful and has it preached by His disciples, whom He sends even as He was sent by the Father.

Where there is forgiveness of sins and the hearts, as St. Peter says, are purified by faith, there good works will surely follow, proceeding from a

sanctified source. Faith slumbers not, and the Holy Ghost ever prompts to obedience to God's Word and to a warfare against flesh and sin.

May God grant His grace, through Christ Jesus, both to believe and to experience this truth. Amen.

Second Sunday After Easter. (Misericordias Domini.) John 10:11-16

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

This Gospel, like other works of Christ, may be considered in two aspects, as teaching first faith, and secondly love. To our faith the fact is presented that Christ is the Shepherd, the only one who lays down His life for His sheep. No human being, no saint, no angel could accomplish the great work of redeeming fallen man, whom the devil, through the sin committed in paradise, had hurled into death; Christ alone could be this Redeemer through His death. This was this Shepherd's proper work, which no one else can imitate, as little as any other of His works done for our salvation can be equaled.

No one can therefore appropriate to himself the words which Christ here uses: "I am the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." With these words He would teach us to trust in Him, to regard the sufferings of all the saints as naught when compared with His sufferings in our behalf. Moses, the prophets and the apostles were eminent men, true

and watchful shepherds and rulers among the people of God; they taught and preached aright what it behooved men to believe and to do; they also suffered much on that account, the most of them even dying the martyr's death; yet notwithstanding all this they can in no wise be compared with Christ. He is the Only Begotten of the Father, the Lord of glory, the true and only Shepherd over all, who from the foundation of the world spake through the patriarchs and the prophets, and in the fullness of time became man, revealing His Father's will. He indeed "laid down His life for the sheep," for all who believe in Him, who trust in Him in life and in death, assured that in Him there is redemption from the power of the devil who held the whole human race in the bondage of sin and death. He also established an everlasting Church throughout the world, and keeps it through His Word, continually increasing her boundaries, that His name may be hallowed and worshiped and confessed. To this end He gave unto the Church His Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who protects her by power divine against the wrath, fury and murderous assaults of the devil and his servants. And though very many lose their life as martyrs of their faith and confession now, yet will they, in the great day of resurrection, be brought by Him into life eternal with all the elect, where there is inexpressible joy and happiness unalloyed; and this to the utter confusion and everlasting shame of His enemies and theirs.

All this no angel can accomplish, much less a man, though he be a patriarch, a prophet, or an apostle. Moses, all the prophets, the apostles and other faithful shepherds, when they had finished their preaching and had performed their duties well, passed away in death; Christ, however, is the same yesterday, today and forever. Therefore He is a different Shepherd from all others who have watched the fold of Christ. These may indeed have faithfully guarded the flock entrusted to them, and may have fed their sheep on the true Word of God, directing them to Christ as the great Shepherd of souls; nor did they flee and leave their flocks unprotected when the wolf was seen approaching, but bravely met him, defending their herds, when necessary, even at the sacrifice of their own lives; yet with all this devotion to their sheep, their shepherds could not take away from them their sins, nor free them from death. Christ, the great Shepherd, alone could and did do this through His own death. Others might indeed lay down their life as a testimony to the truth of the word which they preached, and to confirm

their people in the pure doctrine which they taught from God's Word, but more they could not accomplish thereby. Of this more anon.

Even if we have nothing to fear from the enemies of God's Word, if we preach it in its purity, or refuse to hear the voice of a stranger, if our body and life is secure from persecution and murder, yet it behooves us to take good heed against the most dangerous wolf, the devil, that he may not pounce upon us and tear us into pieces in a much more dreadful manner than earthly tyrants do, who indeed can slay the body, but are not able to injure the soul. To escape this wolf we dare not depend upon our holy life, upon our good works and righteousness, not even upon the fulfillment of the law of God. The law is of no avail in this regard; it even causes us sorrow, by accusing us in our conscience of our faithlessness and many shortcomings in the sight of the Lord our God. It shows us our disobedience, our want of love and confidence, thus pronouncing against us the sentence of eternal damnation. Much less will our vows, our chastity, our penances, and whatever other works we might do, avail us anything; they are works of our own choosing, often contrary to the Word and will of God; therefore we cannot rely upon them.

We must absolutely dispense with all self-made consolation and learn to depend entirely, in unshaken faith, upon Him who says in our text: "I am the good Shepherd, and I lay down my life for my sheep." He does not flee before the wolf; He would rather die under the teeth of the wolf than suffer him to destroy even the smallest of the flock. Hence we ought to rely on Him in this great danger and seek alone His mighty defense. We must have faith to do this; we can do nothing of ourselves in this regard; Christ has done all and does all for us, and commands us to accept His merits in our behalf with true, unwavering faith.

The other lesson is that the example of our great Shepherd is set before us for our imitation, as St. Peter writes, 1 Pet. 2: "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead unto sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." Of this doctrine, pertaining to faith more directly, he makes an application to our daily life and the practice of love toward others, when he says in the same chapter: "Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps." As Christ died for us, to save us

from death and condemnation by His own sacrifice, without any price paid by ourselves, thus it behooves us to serve one another, regardless of pain and sacrifice. Thus the example of Christ is followed, and thus every Christian becomes a good shepherd. If I cannot by my death rescue others from damnation and sin, for, as we have seen above, Christ the great Shepherd can alone do this, I can nevertheless set others a bright example of the power of faith even in death, so that they may come to Jesus and learn to know Him as their Saviour. The world and the devil certainly are deadly enemies of the Gospel, and so is the Pope, who exerts all his power to crush the efficacy of the Word. Hence faithful shepherds must be prepared for persecutions, and be ready, if necessary, to lay down their life in defense of the truth.

Pious, faithful pastors are needed, who are sure of their redemption in Jesus Christ and are ready to follow the example given by Him, even to die for their flock and to lay their heads on the block as martyrs of the Word. Such a devotion to truth saves not others, it is true, for salvation comes alone by the death of Christ; but it serves to confirm the faith of the brethren. Thus God is glorified in my death, and my brother is strengthened in his faith by my blood, though it has no saving power. Salvation can come only through the death of the true Shepherd, Jesus Christ, as we have repeatedly stated.

In this connection we must not forget that false teachers and tyrants, who persecute the pure doctrine and condemn it, are called wolves, A true Christian, however, will not be frightened when the wolf comes, nor will he permit his neighbor to be deprived of the Word and true knowledge of Jesus; he would rather lay down his life than to have others deprived of these blessings, as the apostles and the martyrs did, who did not flee from the wolf, but resisted him to the last.

So it should still be. He who wishes to be a minister of the Gospel must have his whole heart in the calling, earnestly desirous of the glory of God and the welfare of his fellow men. If this is not the only aim one has in this holy office, if he looks to external gain or loss, he is simply not fit to be a minister of Christ. He is either a coward who disgracefully flies when the wolf comes, leaving the sheep unprotected at the mercy of the enemy, as our Lord says: "A hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep and fleeth;" or he is afraid

boldly to speak the truth and suffers the flock to wander away from the good pasture, without preaching to them the Word of God. They who preach for outward gain, for money, and are not content with their daily bread, which God kindly gives, are nothing but hirelings. We preachers must be satisfied if we have an adequate support; if we long for more we are hirelings who care not for their flocks. A true shepherd will sacrifice all, even his life, for the welfare of those entrusted to his care.

This example of the good Shepherd is however not merely given for those who are in the office of the ministry, but for all Christians. It is a duty pertaining to all, to make a bold confession of their faith and rather to die than to abjure the Word and to commit idolatry. They know that if they must yield up their life on earth they have a good Shepherd, through whose death for them they shall live for evermore.

Christ continues His discourse by speaking of His sheep, distinguishing them from others. He points out His truth as distinct from heresy and all other doctrine, saying: "I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep." The meaning of these words is: If you wish to be my sheep, all depends upon your really knowing me, your Shepherd; no harm can then befall you. It is therefore an urgent duty of every true preacher of the Gospel to preach Christ, and Him alone, so that people may learn to know Him as to His person and His blessings, keeping His Word and honoring Him alone as the good Shepherd who laid down His life for them. To impress this truth upon the hearts of the people, to present to them their Shepherd, is an imperative duty of every Christian minister.

Then we must also urge the example presented, that as Christ willingly gave Himself up and suffered for us, so we ought to be ready to endure and suffer every ill and persecution for the Word's sake. Both these points we must preach to our people. Whoever hears and practices these lessons is a sheep in the fold of Christ, for He has said: "My sheep hear my voice." If we preach and teach this truth we are good shepherds, though we cannot die for the sheep as Christ did.

Those persons who will not hear this preaching, or who as preachers will not proclaim it to their flock, are not good shepherds, but even the best of them are hirelings and ravenous wolves. Such preachers ought not to be

indulged; we ought to avoid them like the very devil. Yet the Pope is just such an one. He teaches falsely and denies that Christ is the only good Shepherd who can save from death, when he directs people to be their own shepherds, to flee from the wolf by virtue of their own good works. Thus they preach in the Pope's church the necessity of the mass, of pilgrimages, of monastic practices, and the like.

If we are to be true Christians we must heed the Word of Christ, even as a sheep heeds the words of its shepherd, while it disregards the language of a stranger. We therefore say to the Pope and his preachers: We know not your voice; you are wolves intent on our destruction; depart, and hush your howlings; we follow only the voice of our good Shepherd.

Christ says: "They shall hear my voice," and again: "A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers." It is impossible that a sheep which has heard and understood the voice of the good Shepherd, and in whose heart faith has found an abiding place, should yet heed a doctrine which is contrary to the words of Christ. We indeed heed the laws of kings and princes, the regulations of municipalities and the like, because they pertain only to this temporal life; they have nothing to do with our salvation, for no compliance with the laws and regulations of this world can bring us into life eternal. If therefore any preacher comes, not as an official of the powers of this world, but professedly in the name of God, and tells us that we must do penance for our sins, and that we can be saved by means of the mass, by doing charitable works, etc., we answer him: Thou art a cheat; we know not thy voice; it sounds like the voice of a wolf.

Experience has taught that a sheep is gifted by nature above other animals with a most acute distinction of sounds. Among ten thousand people it recognizes its shepherd by the sound of his voice and follows him; and if ten thousand sheep are collected in one flock and all the ewes are bleating, each little lamb knows the voice of its mother, and runs to meet her.

Christ, no doubt, has reference in our Gospel to this peculiarity. He would say: I also have such lambs; I am their Shepherd and they are able to distinguish my voice and to follow it. Nor will they obey if any other voice calls them. If we therefore desire to be His sheep, we must have this sure

faculty of hearing and must be able to distinguish His voice from every other, however pleasant, clear and friendly this may be.

We should therefore learn from this Gospel and earnestly endeavor to practice it, that we must hear the Word of God and be firmly grounded in it against the allurements of the devil, who is an unceasing tempter to everything evil, and who is ever prepared to lead us to destruction, and against every form of false doctrine. The wolf is full of cunning; if he cannot overcome you with false doctrine, he will try to do so by instilling wicked thoughts into your heart. Then is the proper time for us to say: I heed not this voice; it is that of the wolf and not that of my Shepherd; my Shepherd's voice tells me: "I am the good Shepherd: and I lay down my life for the sheep;" but thou wolf wouldst fain induce me to fear Him and to run away from Him. If we can meet the enemy with such determination, we will succeed in expelling him from our presence; yea, the devil will then desist from oppressing our hearts and from the attempt to lead us astray; he will not succeed in making us afraid or despondent. If we thus become thoroughly acquainted with the voice of our good Shepherd, if we can distinguish Him by it among a thousand, we will then know Him well and He in return will know and love us. How, indeed, could He be our enemy who gave His own life that we might live forever, and who rescues us from sin, death and every evil? No other voice but His will give us such comfort; therefore we must heed it well.

These expressions of Christ in our text are still further so cheering and consolatory, because He calls Himself a Shepherd, and us, who have and hear His Word, His sheep. No Christian can now reasonably complain that he is forsaken. It may be that one is in need of money and earthly property; another may be deprived of health; and a third may want something else, so that it might appear that we were in the midst of wolves and without a shepherd, as Christ also says: "Behold, I send you as sheep into the midst of wolves." We can see it with our own eyes, every day of our life, how the Christian Church is in the condition of a sheep which the wolf has seized by its fleece and which he is about to devour. It may seem sometimes as if we were without a Shepherd. But thus it must be, else we would not seek our only comfort in our true Shepherd's reed, which sounds so invitingly when Christ says: "My sheep know my voice."

If we obey this voice and follow it, we can then truly say that we know our Shepherd and that we are known of Him. Nor can the devil injure him who heeds and follows the Word of the good Shepherd. No matter what may betide our person under the providence of God, or our possessions, or our household, we will ever hear the voice of our Shepherd, who cheers us with these words: Ye are my dearly purchased flock who know my voice and who I am; I will not forget you. Such recognition has its foundation in the Word and in faith; on none other can it rest; therefore Christ declares: "I know them even as the Father knoweth me and I the Father."

When Christ, the Son of God, yet walked on earth, it often seemed as if He was entirely in the power of the devil and his imps, so that they could practice upon Him all their malicious pranks at pleasure. God had apparently deserted Him. But when Christ in great agony exclaims: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me," when He died upon the cross and was buried, and the devil really thought that Christ had no God, then it was manifest that the Father knew Him well, for He leads forth His Son from death and hell.

Even so, Christ declares, shall it be with you, my sheep. Be not confounded, though it seems at first as if I knew you not. A Christian must, while yet on earth, endure many misfortunes, sorrows, sins and all kinds of miseries, as though there were no difference between him and the wicked. His life and death, outwardly viewed, have nothing peculiar; it even seems, now and then, that God leads the Christian through much severer trials than if he were a heathen; he certainly has more conflicts with temptations and other tribulations of the soul. But be not disconcerted thereby; remember what thy Shepherd has said: "I know my sheep."

Ah, say the devil and our unhallowed reason, why do we fare so badly if we are sheep of Christ's fold? We answer: It is nevertheless a fact that He knows us, nor will we waver in this faith, though death and misfortune visit us. We know His voice and hear it plainly, declaring unto us in the tones of a shepherd to his lambs: I am your Shepherd, who laid down His life for you. These words we hear and believe, and thereby have a certain proof that we know Him and are known of Him. Nor shall our experience in life change this conviction. Troubles here on earth are but temporal, but His Word assures us of life eternal. What matters it if we must die, just like those who believe not in Christ? The voice of our Shepherd comes to our

ears in the most friendly tones with the assurance: "Whosoever believeth in me, shall never die;" and again: "I lay down my life for the sheep." On account of these declarations we are fully convinced that our Shepherd, Jesus Christ, knows us and that we are safe in His care.

This recognition, however, does not yet become manifest, so that faith may be exercised; for if by means of Baptism we were entirely exempt from impurity and death, we would have no need of the Word nor of faith. But because the Word still remains, it must be accepted in faith, and not by experience, until that final day when faith shall cease and everything shall be seen and experienced.

Beyond all doubt, man becomes through Baptism pure and beautiful before God, even as the sun itself; no sin remains in him; he is fully justified, as Christ says: "He who believes and is baptized, shall be saved." This, however, is not perceptible to the eye; but it is true according to the Word and ordination of Christ. It is therefore all-important that we exercise implicit faith in the Word, that we do not in the least deviate from it, convinced that in the life to come all that we now hear through the Word and believe will be manifest in the bliss of eternal life. As this life and the life after death are essentially different, it is impossible fully to experience here on earth what we shall feel and understand hereafter.

It therefore exceeds our skill to distinguish beyond all mistake a Christian from other men. Who, indeed, can assert that he has eternal life? And yet we must declare it as a simple fact, that a child, which by nature is oppressed with death, sin and other ills, which show nought of eternal life, begins eternal life at the time of its Baptism. How is this possible? No change is perceptible, indeed, in the mode of life; yet God has substituted for the former life of sin and corruption an eternal life, beginning already in this world, and this new life is a reality, according to the Word and to faith, though we neither see nor feel it now.

Consequently, if we wish to know who is a Christian, we must not judge by the outward appearance, but by the Word. A sheep lives because it hears the voice of its shepherd, for surely as soon as it disregards this voice it will go astray and becomes a prey to wolves. The only safety is in the neighborhood of the shepherd; therefore that sheep which hears the shepherd's voice is secure. Just so the Christian. If he does not hear the

Word of Christ he has no consolation; if he faithfully heeds this Word he has everything that Christ achieved for him, forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Then he will be filled with hope and joy every day of his life. In the midst of his labors and in the performance of his daily duties, while he eats and drinks and works, yes even while he suffers pains, which are also ordained of God, he realizes that he is a sheep in the fold of Jesus; to His voice he listens, and judges his life not according to what he sees and feels, but according to the words of Christ: "I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep."

Let us learn this lesson and accustom ourselves to accept calmly the fact that Christians must yet suffer and die like other men. It is true Christian wisdom and a precious acquirement if we can say: In the outward, daily life and experiences of men, we see no difference between Christians and unbelievers, unless it be this, that the faithful often endure much more sorrow and misfortune than the others, yet we know that a great difference exists between them, in their relation to the Word, so that the Christian is distinguishable from the infidel not by his features, nor even by his apparent piety, but by his having and hearing the voice of his Shepherd. Heathens, Turks, Jews, hypocrites and false Christians, who propose to earn their salvation by their own good works, do not hear nor heed this voice; nor do the tyrants and the unchristian, Epicurean multitude, nor the Pope with his sycophants, know this Shepherd's call, which is heard and understood alone by the lambs and sheep of the fold of Jesus. Otherwise, in external appearance and temporal avocations, there is no difference.

The meaning of the words of Christ: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also must I bring, and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd," became evident on the day of Pentecost, when the Gospel began to be preached by the apostles to all the world. This Gospel still continues its conquests throughout the world, but we must not expect all men to accept its teaching and to be saved; this will never happen; the devil prevents it. The world is opposed to the Word and refuses to be admonished, therefore various beliefs and religions will continue to exist. "One fold and one Shepherd" simply means that God will for Christ's sake receive all as His dear children, whether they were Jews or Gentiles, who

believe the Gospel. The only true religion is, to follow this Shepherd and to hear His voice.

May our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the only and true Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, grant us this faith; unto whom be honor and glory now and forever. Amen.

Third Sunday After Easter. (Jubilate.) John 16:1 6-23.

A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father, Then said some of His disciples among themselves, What is this that He saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that He saith, A little while? we cannot tell what He saith. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him, and said unto them, Do you inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. And in that day ye shall ask me nothing.

Our text is a portion of those parting words which Christ addressed to His disciples, while He was seated with them at the table, in the evening before His betrayal by Judas into the hands of the Jews. He wished the disciples to understand their duty and to regulate their actions accordingly, after their Master would be given over into the hands of His enemies, and therefore tells them that, although they would be sad and would mourn at the event, they should yet be comforted, inasmuch as the separation would not be of long duration, and that they should see Him again in a little while, after He had arisen from the dead, and that then their joy would be an everlasting one.

John tells us further how the disciples were puzzled at these expressions of Jesus, for they could not comprehend what He meant by the words “a little while;” nor did they understand their meaning after Christ had explained it to them. The same perplexity controls us in this regard; we cannot rightly apprehend this “little while;” for the very same obstacle which prevented the disciples from understanding these words lies before us and dims our vision.

When tribulation came, and when the disciples saw the horrible and pitiable death of their Master, they could not realize that this was to be but for a little while; they thought that this was the end of their Lord and of His work, and expected nothing else than persecution, suffering and death, even as it had happened to their Master.

They were far from believing that after two days their Lord would arise from the dead to an endless life, and would be their Redeemer from sin, death and hell, and give them finally everlasting life. Hence it happened to them, as St. John elsewhere relates, that on Easter they were gathered together with closed doors for fear of the Jews, and would not at all credit the report of Christ’s resurrection, although the women, Peter and the other two disciples had seen Him. They were entirely incredulous as to the “little while” of this occurrence; they thought Christ would have to remain in death as other men, and this caused their great sorrow, else they would have cheerfully awaited His resurrection and would thus have been comforted.

We act repeatedly as the disciples do here. As soon as God permits a misfortune to befall us we despond, and think that there is no remedy nor rescue possible from its weight. We are not prepared to exclaim or believe that, after a little while, God will mercifully and unexpectedly come to our assistance, and are therefore hopeless, fit only for complaint and lamentation. In this we err; for St. Paul says that we ought to rejoice in tribulation and be bold, both on account of the present help, which will surely come if we but believe the Word, and because tribulation is a certain trial by which we may know that we are God’s children. Of this we shall treat further on.

Our text is therefore full of comfort, not only for the disciples, but for all Christians: They are exhorted to learn the meaning of the word modicum, which means “a little while,” that they may apply it as a remedy in

tribulation, knowing the truth of the comfortable assurance that the troubles shall last but for a little while, after which sorrow will pass away and joy and gladness take its place.

For the purpose of comprehending this consolation the better, we will now speak in general of crosses and sorrows. Our reason assumes that God, if He cared for us and loved us, would ward off all evil from us, whereas now troubles and miseries crowd in upon us from every side; hence the conclusion is that God has either forgotten us, or else He has become our enemy and cares no longer for us; for surely if it were otherwise He would deliver us from our grief and distress. But such thoughts are wicked, and since they are very apt to arise, we must guard against them by applying the Word in true faith, and by following its precepts and not our own thoughts. If we judge our experiences in daily life aside from the light which the Word of God casts upon them, we shall inevitably become victims of error.

What says the Word in this connection? Not even a single hair shall fall from our head against the will of God. If we accept this declaration in earnest faith, we will conclude that neither the devil nor the world, no matter how powerful they are, can harm the Christian in the least, if it is not God's will that they should do so. Christ makes this plain in the parable of the sparrows; these are really useless birds, which do more injury than good, and yet not one of them shall fall to the ground and perish unless it be the will of the Father in heaven, Matt. 10. Now, if we have any confidence whatever in the words of Jesus, we must conclude from this that God will certainly concern Himself much rather for men than for many sparrows; He therefore will guard them well and will not permit the devil and the world to harm a single one of His Christians against His will. If troubles do come, we infer that God has first given His consent; for against His knowledge they could not arise. Let us well remember this truth, so that we do not think, when evils surround us, that we are forsaken of God; for He has not forgotten where we are, nor is He ignorant of our condition, though He permits sorrows to invest us.

Another still more dangerous thought arises frequently under such circumstances. We are prone to say: If the sufferings which we endure are providential, then surely God cannot be our friend; for if He were, He would not permit this misery to visit us, but would ward it off, and make us happy and prosperous. Then comes the conscience in addition, with its

accusations of our sins and misdoings, so that our condition becomes nearly desperate, and we are not far from hatred towards God, and turn away from Him to seek help somewhere else, where we are forbidden to go. We would more patiently bear our misfortune, and would regard it less burdensome, if the devil and wicked men had brought it upon us. Let us, then, hold firmly to God's Word and resist these subtle insinuations and arguments of our natural man; if we do not, we shall either fall victims to despair or become open enemies of God.

What says God's Word in regard to this? St. Paul writes, 1 Cor. 11: "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." These words are plain: God chastens and disciplines those whom He would bring into eternal life; they suffer many severe trials of sorrow and of pain, of misfortunes and tribulations, yet God is their friend. Let us not forget these words of the apostle. We all have our griefs and pains, and if we candidly ask ourselves: Had this tribulation not come upon me, would I not have fallen into some other calamity or sin, and is it not better thus, when God by these trials keeps me in faith and brings me to His Word and keeps me at prayer? – I say, if we candidly look at our experience in this light, we shall surely find that God is not our enemy, even if He smites us, but that He in reality manifests His love toward us, and would by this discipline keep us from eternal misery.

In this sense does St. Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews, cite the expression of Solomon, Proverbs 3: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." And in the same connection: "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

These passages teach us that the stripes which are inflicted on us by the hand of God are prompted by His paternal love and not by His wrath. If therefore we feel the infliction, let us not suppose that God is angry with us or that He cares not for us. He disciplines us because we are children, that we may not fall short of the inheritance which He has in store for us.

This lesson concerning the purpose of sorrows and sufferings, which the Word teaches us, we also learn from facts and examples. Surely no one would have the presumption to assert that God Almighty, the Father in heaven, did not love His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ; and yet when we view His life and death, if we were to judge from mere external appearances, we would have to say that no love of the Father is manifest there, that He is hostile and cruel towards His Son and punishes Him with utter severity, while the wicked Jews, intent on malicious actions, are spared. It is as Isaiah says: "Yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." And the Jews in mockery said to Him when He was crucified: "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross."

If God thus willed it with His Son on earth, we need not wonder if the Christians have a similar experience. Christ says: "The servant is not above his master, if they have persecuted me they will also persecute you." And in the epistle to the Hebrews the apostle says very appropriately: "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." Thus we see how Scripture and examples fully agree in this regard, wherefore we ought to recognize in our sorrows and sufferings God's good and gracious will, and not for a moment think that He has forsaken us. Our tribulation should become unto us a sure testimonial of the love of God to us, because we are assured by such visitations of our Father in heaven that we are His dearly beloved children.

Let us now consider the reason why God thus seemingly unmercifully chastises His children and keeps them smarting under the rod. St. Paul mentions the reason when he says: "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." Likewise we read, Psalm 119: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes." And Isaiah says in the 28. chapter: *Vexatio dat intellectum*, "It shall be a vexation only to understand the report." We must admit that if God gave us everything we desired, if He warded off all misfortune from us, we would become so secure that we would not be

troubled by our sins, nor would we think of God's Word and of prayer. But when we are visited by various adversities we have occasion to resort to prayer and to call to mind how our sins have richly merited such chastisement, and we will thereby be prompted to an amendment of our conduct and to an earnest supplication that the affliction may be removed or moderated. This is the meaning of the words: "But our Father in heaven chastened us for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness."

If now the Christian is afflicted, he ought not to indulge in effeminate complaints and lamentations, but should remember that he has a merciful God in heaven, who has not forsaken him nor any of His children; who sends these trials and sorrows as reminders of man's trespasses and as a call to repentance and to a more faithful obedience and filial love. If we are thus disposed our sorrows will be our gain, and we will be patient under them. Nothing can then move us to become fretful or to seek forbidden remedies; we will quietly await the help of God and pray for it.

Another lesson we must learn. If we know that no evil can befall us against the good and gracious will of God, we must also know and believe that He will find a rescue from our tribulation and will furnish present assistance. This consolation is fitly expressed by the Apostle Paul, 1 Cor. 10: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." In full accord with this is the modicum, "a little while," of our text: "Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy," yea, into a joy which is everlasting.

There are two prominent reasons why our faith in regard to this "little while" is often wanting or weak. We are apt to regard the affliction when upon us as too severe and are ready to succumb to it. Thus when the chief marshal of the king of Assyria demanded the surrender of Jerusalem, Hezekiah sent to the prophet Isaiah this message:

"This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth." The same figure of speech is used by our Lord in the text when He speaks of the woman in travail; apparently there is no help, mother and child must die. Thus the tribulations of the Christians are not insignificant nor easy to be borne, as we learn from the 69. Psalm, where Christ Himself exclaims in

agony: “Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.”

The second reason why we are so desponding is contained in our inability to discover ways and means of escape from our miseries. We are quick to conclude that there is no help possible; we refuse to believe that the troubles will last but “a little while.” To encourage us in this despondency the Lord adduces in our Gospel the example of the woman in travail. When we view her in her distress it seems that there is no help for her, she must perish; but in a moment all is changed; instead of death a twofold life succeeds: the mother is convalescent and a bright, healthy child is born into the world. All sorrow vanishes and rapturous joy ensues. Of this we have examples every day; for fatal results at child-birth, though now and then occurring, are nevertheless not frequent. Generally great happiness quickly succeeds pain and suffering, as Christ here says. This lesson we ought to lay to heart; for this purpose the Lord taught it to His disciples. When sorrows, tribulations and afflictions come, let us call to mind that they will continue only “a little while” and after that joy is ours. The apostle teaches this same lesson to the Hebrews when he tells them: “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

Because of the sudden and often unexpected change of sorrows into joy our tribulations are said to be but for “a little while.” Again, because our afflictions are exchanged in the end for everlasting happiness, they are regarded as but for “a little while.” What matters it though poor Lazarus suffers for ten or for twenty years, if after that he is to be eternally comforted? St. Paul says, Rom. 8: “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” And 2 Cor. 4: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” And St. Peter says, 1 Pet. 1: “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise

and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” And once more we read in the 5. chapter: “But the God of all grace, who has called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”

If, therefore, we firmly believe that we here have to undergo ills which last but “a little while,” we will be cheered even in sorrows. Hence it behooves us to trust implicitly in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, knowing that His Word is true, though misfortune and affliction overwhelm us for “a little while;” then will we be comforted in sorrows, even as a woman is comforted in travail by the thought that God will soon turn her pain into pleasure by the sight of the child which is born. We cannot have real joy and gladness without preceding pain and sorrow. Our reason may attempt to persuade us that such afflictions are certainly proofs of God’s displeasure and indifference toward us, but we must not heed such insinuations; they are false. A woman in travail must have sorrow and anguish, else the new man cannot be born into this world. Thus God sends us afflictions that we may find a rescue from them, and then much gladness of heart.

The Lord most cheerfully tells His disciples what manner of joy awaits them in “a little while.” He says: “I will see you again.” This promise was fulfilled on Easter, when He did appear unto them in a new life glorified. Thus He appears unto us, and our hearts are glad, when we remember His death and resurrection, His victory over sin, death and hell in our behalf, so that we through Him might live evermore. This is true, unalloyed and everlasting joy, which turns away all sorrow and which cannot be taken away.

Let us therefore not be impatient or unbelieving when affliction comes, but let us hold fast to the comfortable assurance that though we suffer, it will be but for “a little while.” Christ has arisen and sitteth at the right hand of the Father to check the devil with his tribulations and to make us happy for ever and for ever.

God grant us this blessing through His Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Fourth Sunday After Easter. (Cantate.) John 16:5-15.

But now I go my way to Him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest Thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall bear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

This is a delightful Gospel. It treats especially of that chief and all-important article of our faith from which we have our name Christians. Therefore we cannot sufficiently learn this lesson, though we hear it once a year; if it is to produce in our hearts a faith that is firm and fruitful, we must hear it often and practice it diligently.

This Gospel, like the one of last Sunday, is filled with words of consolation, which the Lord addressed to His disciples at the table, on that memorable evening before He was betrayed and made a captive. He now desired above all to prepare His disciples for the coming tribulation, so that they might not be offended at His pitiable, disgraceful death, but might

know what great blessings would result therefrom, and that thus they might be comforted.

Therefore, as they were cheered in the Gospel of one week ago with the declaration that their sorrows and tribulations would be but for a little while, after which eternal happiness should come, so they are strengthened in the text of today by the explanation of the necessity and importance of the death of their Lord and Master.

He says: "But now I go my way to Him that sent me; that is: Tomorrow I shall be crucified and put to death, and yet no one among you asks me whither I go or why this takes place, but because I told you of it, your hearts are filled with sadness." Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away;" it is done for your welfare. "For if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you," and the power of darkness will retain its sway. "But if I depart I will send the Holy Ghost unto you." Christ wants us to learn and to know this, in order that His sufferings may neither offend nor frighten us, but may be unto us a source of consolation, since we know that by them the influence and tyranny of the devil was broken and the Holy Spirit was given and imparted unto us.

The Lord explains still further what the Holy Ghost would accomplish, what He would bring and teach us: "He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." Indeed a great task, so vast that its execution seems impossible. Not merely one school, or one village, or one city, or even several of them, but the whole world shall come under the influence and reproof of the Holy Spirit. It must in truth be a mighty power which can accomplish such a task, and it must be sure of the necessary support. To the world belong all the descendants of Adam, emperors, kings and princes. All these are included among the number of those whom the Holy Ghost, through the preaching of the apostles and other ministers, is to reprove and admonish. He tells them: Ye are all sinners; not one of you is just or wise, whether you live in Jerusalem or in Rome, whether you are of high or low degree; you must all learn true wisdom of me, or not one of you will be saved. If you despise my teachings, you shall all go to hell, just as you are, with your entire baggage of self-righteousness, of holiness and good works. Thus, says Christ to His disciples, will the Holy Spirit execute His office of reproofing the whole world through you, the poor and despised preachers of the Gospel.

This reproof, however, is no idle sound, but dread reality. Christ says: "He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." What now, if there is in the world no righteousness, no judgment, nothing but sin – what shall become of us? Hence the reproof of the Holy Ghost is for the world a terrible shock; we hear that we are the devil's own, with all our good works, and that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God unless the Holy Ghost removes our sins, makes us righteous, and frees us from judgment. Many passages in the Scriptures are of similar import. Thus St. Paul says: "God has concluded all under sin;" and again: "We were by nature children of wrath." Christ also says: "Unless a man be born again he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." With such words and declarations the Holy Ghost reproves the world of sin.

What is sin? Is it to steal, to murder, to commit adultery, and the like? Yea, these are indeed sins, but they are not those which are most prevalent and most grave. Many persons are not guilty of these manifest sins; but of that chief sin of which the Holy Ghost reproves the world, no one is free, else the Holy Ghost could not reprove the whole world. This great sin is the unbelief of the world, the refusal to believe in Jesus Christ. Nor does the world know anything of this sin before the Holy Ghost reproves the people of it through His teachings; the world considers only such deeds sinful as are contrary to the second table of the law. It knows nothing of Christ, and much less is it aware of the sin of not believing in Him. But we need not talk of the world in this regard; we find many among the Christians who do not consider unbelief a sin, much less an original sin. No one but the Holy Ghost can teach the world that unbelief is sin; He reproves all as sinners, no matter how some may attempt to cover up their faults by good works or to pass themselves off as pure under the tinsel of self-righteousness.

The Holy Ghost, therefore, preaches this truth that all men, without an exception, are sinners and cannot of themselves believe in Christ. This is, of course, strange preaching for the world. The world of itself is perfectly ignorant of the duty of having faith in Christ, the Son of man. Men suppose that they have fulfilled their duty if they can say with the Pharisee, Luke 18, that they are no murderers, no adulterers and no unjust persons.

But the Holy Ghost teaches otherwise and tells man: I know that this one or that one may lead an outwardly upright life, but still the great sin of

unbelief nestles deep down in the heart of every one. If we are not reprov'd of this sin by the Holy Ghost, we will never discover it.

We must then infer from this that “every thing not concluded in faith is sin,” whether it be monastic vows, or prayers, fastings, and giving of alms. Wherever faith in Christ is wanting, there the Holy Ghost must come with His reproof. There is no other way to be relieved from this sin but to believe in Christ Jesus the Saviour.

This is an overwhelming truth, and yet the Pope with his followers attempt to gainsay it. When they cannot remove the text itself, they say that it speaks *de fide formata per caritatem*, that is, of faith as formed by love. But this is a false interpretation of the text. Christ evidently speaks here of the great sin of unbelief in Him. Therefore, though there are ever so many works of love performed by man, if faith in Christ is wanting they will avail nothing, and he who performs them is nevertheless a sinner whom the Holy Ghost reprov'es on account of his sins.

Unbelief is therefore the principal sin, from which all transgressions take their origin. Wherever unbelief dwells, there faith in Christ is banished, and the result is that His Word is rejected; it is either treated with contempt or regarded as heresy and falsehood and therefore persecuted as if it were the word of the devil. From this other great evils spring: disobedience towards parents and those in authority, neglect in the fulfillment of the duties of one's office and calling, indulgence in all kinds of lasciviousness and lawlessness; although a few, perhaps, may lead an unblameable life before men from fear of detection and of scandal. Such are the blossoms and fruits of this tree of unbelief; its growth is immense and cannot be checked except by the power of the Holy Ghost. Whosoever does not believe in Christ has not the Holy Ghost and cannot have a single good thought; and if perchance he performs some work not evil in itself, and proper, he does this in slavish fear and not from true, earnest obedience to God's Word. The world is consequently the devil's household, devoid of every thing good in word and in deed. It cannot be otherwise, since unbelief is the source of all evil.

We can therefore very appropriately describe the world as a crowd of men on earth who do not believe in Christ, but abuse and despise His Word, who internally and externally, with thoughts, words and deeds, kill, steal,

rob, and practice all manner of wickedness, often abusing for this purpose the blessings and merciful gifts of God.

Christ in our text instructs His apostles, and all ministers of His Word, to battle against such iniquity, powerfully to reprove the world of sin by telling it unceasingly, as long as time lasts, that it has no part in the kingdom of Christ, because it does not believe in Him, but is assuredly the devil's property, not so much on account of outward, gross sins as on account of the source of all sin, unbelief. We cannot remedy this by becoming monks, nor by many good works, for as long as unbelief remains in our hearts we are accursed sinners beyond all hope of redemption. The only remedy in this our desperate condition is to thrust aside our unbelief, to have faith in Christ, and in Him alone to find consolation against sin and death.

You have often heard, my beloved, what is meant by "faith." It is not simply a knowledge of Christ, nor a mere assent to the truth of His Word, but an earnest confidence in our hearts that what He did for the world was done actually for us, for our salvation. The devil knows well enough that Christ died, and his belief in this regard is as strong as that of the Papists; but he does not believe that this death occurred for him also and for his benefit. The Holy Ghost alone has the power to produce in the heart the confidence in Christ which accepts Him as a Saviour. Whosoever has not this faith, nor believes that Christ died for him to save him from sin and eternal death, is not a Christian and remains a sinner, even if he tortures himself to death with his so-called good works.

When thus the Holy Ghost reproves the world of sin, He makes it manifest that everything in us is sin, and that we with all our good works and saintly life are after all in the sight of God naught but miserable, accursed sinners, if we do not believe in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore away with all hoods, tonsures, orders, and all similar human instrumentalities devised to obtain forgiveness of sins! It is a contradiction to say that Christ died for us, and at the same time to wear a cowl or to perform this or that work for the purpose of becoming pious and entering heaven. He who does not heed the reproof of the Holy Ghost, and does not accept Christ, evidently demonstrates thereby that he does not regard himself as a sinner and that he has no faith in the Lord.

Again it is the office of the Comforter to “reprove the world of righteousness.” This is also a hard saying. Sin the world has, that we know, but piety and righteousness it has none, nor does it know where or how to obtain them. What then is meant by this term “righteousness?” The world has indeed laws and tribunals of justice; even the old heathens had appropriate legislation and institutions in regard to civil duties and the execution of their laws. Surely, it cannot be wrong to inflict punishment upon thieves and murderers. Is not all this very just and proper?

Christ answers thus: Call the regulations of this life as you will, only call them not righteousness, which would be false; for here is not meant the righteousness of the jurists, but that indicated in the words: “Because I go to my Father and ye see me no more.” This is an intricate expression, more difficult to be understood than the one in regard to our being sinners because we do not believe in Christ, and surely this is difficult enough for our natural man to comprehend. We suppose that we have within us natural powers which enable us to worship properly, to prepare ourselves for the reception of pardon, and to pray for it aright. Such supposition makes it even now impossible for the Papists to understand this declaration concerning faith in Christ. But still more incomprehensible is this expression concerning “righteousness.” It declares that we are then pleasing in the sight of God when Christ goeth to the Father and we see Him no more. And yet this statement is beautiful and forcible.

Why should we then laud or mention our works? Christ distinctly says in our text, that we cannot become righteous by virtue of our own exertions, but only because “He went to the Father.” Here we find true righteousness. The world knows nothing of it, since the writings of men do not at all allude to it. We are taught by the wisdom of this world that if we keep the ten commandments, observe the laws of the land, and lead an honest, upright life, we are surely good, just and honorable people. In our text, however, we find nothing of all this, nothing of our own works; Christ speaks alone of what He does, of His work, that He. goes to the Father and we see Him no more. This deed of Christ, and nothing else, is our righteousness.

If, then, we desire to be truly pious we must not rely on our works. It avails nothing if we become monks, and fast and watch and pray; but this avails everything, that we desire to be freed from our sins, and know and believe that Christ went to the Father in our behalf. How is it then with

fasting, with prayers and good works – are they of no value at all? Good works are right and proper; we ought not to neglect them, inasmuch as God ordered them in the law; but they can never justify us or make us pleasing in the sight of God. Christ's going to the Father is the one and only cause of our redemption and justification, and we must look for no other.

This going of Christ to the Father includes His suffering and cruel death upon the cross, His ascension into heaven, and His sitting at the right hand of God. We do not see this, but we believe it, and this precious fact makes us just. We have no righteousness in ourselves, but Christ becomes our righteousness because He goes to the Father; or in plain language: No one becomes righteous, blessed or free from sin, but through the sufferings and death and resurrection of Christ. Such force has the going of Christ to the Father. Hence it is plain that the Papists teach falsely when they say that good works are necessary to salvation. It is right enough to demand of a Christian an upright life and good works, but to say that thereby we are justified and made righteous is a pernicious falsehood. Our text says distinctly that the going of Christ unto the Father brings true righteousness. The world knows nothing of this; the Holy Ghost alone teaches it.

When the Papists quote the expression of Christ: "If thou wouldst enter into eternal life keep the commandments," they misapprehend its meaning, and only prove that they do not understand what it means to keep the commandments of God. It is an indisputable fact that righteousness and eternal life were established by the departure of Christ from this world unto the Father, and they come from no other source. Nor shall the devil rob us of this conviction. He may perchance cause us fear and disquietude of conscience on account of our natural weakness and sinfulness, but he cannot deprive us of our hope and faith in Christ who went the way of perfect obedience to the Father, so that we might have righteousness in Him. This assurance cannot be overthrown by the devil; he may indeed hold up to us our sins, but all his accusations will avail nought if we have in true faith Christ as our Saviour. Let this ever be our chief consolation.

But faith is here absolutely necessary. The great work of Christ is perfect, and it devolves upon us to apply it to ourselves by faith. If we believe, we have the benefits of this work; if we are unbelieving, it avails us nothing. Once for all: Our righteousness, if true, comes to us from without, from Christ and His meritorious death. This truth makes the heart firm,

otherwise, if we had to depend upon our own merits and works, upon our penitence and penance, as the Papists teach, we would never be secure, and would have to live in constant dread of punishment. How indeed could we know when our repentance, our confessions, and penitential tasks are sufficient? Therefore Christ took from us the burden of this suffering and bore it upon His own shoulders, so that we can now implicitly depend upon it that His sufferings and His death are our righteousness. The Son of God Himself performs the work ordained of the Father unto our redemption from sin and death; He is the Lamb of God, as St. John speaks of Him; He is God Almighty, and therefore there is no room to doubt the efficiency of His work of salvation.

Thus we learn, my beloved, how peremptorily this text cuts off all hope of meriting righteousness by our own achievements, since it consists entirely in the going of Christ unto the Father. When once this righteousness is ours by faith, let us then endeavor, as much as possible, to do good works, and let us strive with all our might to, be obedient to God. But we will never be enabled to do even one good work if we have no true faith in Christ in our hearts, and if we lack confidence in His merits; for then our hearts are yet wicked and impure, and we have no forgiveness of sins because we have no faith.

The righteousness of the Christian is therefore a peculiar one and not understood of men, unless it is taught and revealed by the Holy Ghost. And even when thus revealed, it cannot be comprehended by our reason, but must be embraced by faith. When Christ says: "I go to my Father, and ye see me no more," He requires faith, else His words would have no meaning. The Christian's righteousness must be taught by the Holy Ghost; the righteousness of the world, however, can be exhibited by philosophers, by the secular government, by lawyers, by father and mother, and by all in authority. The Christian learns that everything without faith is evil, while the true, eternal righteousness is founded upon the departure of Christ to the Father, where we see Him not, but still have Him through faith as our Lord and Saviour.

Finally, our text tells us, that the Holy Ghost "will reprove the world of judgment." Christ explains fully what judgment is meant in this connection when He further states that "the prince of this world is judged." As the Holy Ghost reproves the world of sin because it does not believe in Christ, and of

righteousness because it will not accept the comfortable fact that Christ went unto the Father, so He also reproves it “of judgment” because of its ignorance and fear in this regard, which is all its own fault, since it will neither accept nor faithfully heed the Gospel of Christ. It is indeed a most distressing calamity to have sin and no righteousness, to be without consolation amid sin, death and every kind of misfortune.

To this fearful calamity Christ refers when He declares that it shall be the office of the Holy Spirit to preach concerning judgment, and to make known to all men the fact that “the prince of this world is judged,” and has no longer the power to harm them who believe in Christ and depend on His going to the Father. The “prince of the world,” for such he still is, may indeed, here and there, attack with his temptations and snares the believers, but he shall not prevail against them; he is judged; his stronghold and his panoply are wrenched from him, and he himself is bound, as St. Peter says, in the chains of darkness. Christ accomplished this overthrow; therefore Christians need no longer tremble before this prince and his power in the world; he is judged and has lost his authority.

The unbelievers are not aware of this. Sometimes they may make a start to become Christians and to believe, but if the world on that account begins to frown on them, they are frightened and fall away, as Christ explains in the parable of the seed upon the rock. With the Christians it is different; they hold fast in faith to the Gospel and heed intently the admonition of the Holy Ghost, not to fear, nor to despair in the agony and woe of sin, because the prince of this world is judged and is deprived of his supremacy. Another and mightier Lord is now in power, even Christ, who vanquished and chained the prince of this world. Be therefore not disturbed nor frightened if this dethroned potentate and god of the world scowls, and gnashes his teeth, and champs, and threatens like a fiend; he is as impotent in his rage as a dog that furiously barks and dashes his chains to the right and to the left, eagerly intent to thrust his fangs into the limbs of the passerby, who easily avoids the rush by stepping to one side of the mad but fettered beast. Just so the devil barks and rages against the Christians, but he is chained and cannot injure them if they have faith in Christ and are constant in prayer. But if we forget this and become careless, we are in danger of injury, or, at least, of great consternation by this hell-hound, who, though in chains and unable to

bite, can yet greatly terrify those who heedlessly approach him; for cross dogs do not always bark, but are also quiet at times, with evil intent.

They who have the office to preach the Word, and in the name of the Holy Ghost to reprove the world of sin and of righteousness, ought to cling firmly to this assurance, that the prince of this world is judged. The world cannot at all endure to be reprov'd of sin; people become enraged when told that they are sinners and devoid of righteousness. If then we come with our reproof, as it is our duty, the world begins to rage and howl in a perfect fit of frenzy. Were it not for the testimony of the Holy Ghost concerning the judgment of "the prince of this world," we preachers would often be frightened by such manifestations of the devil and would hold our peace. The term "*Paracletus*," which means a comforter, a helper, belongs therefore of right to the Holy Ghost. He cheers the hearts in tribulations and danger, and makes them strong to hear and heed the fact that "the prince of this world is judged."

This then we consider to be the office of the Holy Ghost on earth, and the import of His preaching and instruction. Nor is there any doubt that he who refuses to accept this preaching and instruction as the best and most valuable treasure on earth, and would not give up his own life rather than to lose this boon, is no Christian. Life and property are temporal gifts, but this treasure is everlasting; it conveys to us eternal life. St. Paul says: "The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." We ought therefore greatly to rejoice at the going of Christ to the Father, of which He speaks in the text, and give thanks unto God continually, with the earnest prayer that He may mercifully retain in us this knowledge and increase it day by day, so that we may be freed from sin and be made partakers of eternal righteousness, and, finally, that we may be comforted in the assurance that the prince of this world is judged.

After having concluded His statement in regard to the office of the Comforter, Christ continues: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth."

You are aware, my hearers, how the Papists pervert this expression when they pretend to prove by it their innovations and institutions, saying that the

Holy Ghost was their author, and that Christ in this passage prophesied of such work. This is all a most glaring falsehood.

On the contrary, Christ would say in this passage: You, my disciples, have now heard of the office and functions of the Holy Ghost. Concerning this I have yet much to say unto you, but you are unable to comprehend it now; you must learn it by experience. For the Holy Spirit will also guide you into all truth and protect you from false and damnable doctrine. Without such guidance of the Holy Spirit it easily happens that we depart from the truth, that we neglect the Word and suddenly fall into grievous error.

Arius picked out one or two passages and made them the basis of his heresy, while he, on the other hand, disregarded the many plain and convincing testimonies concerning Christ. The Anabaptists take as proof for their doctrine the command of Christ: "Go, teach and baptize all nations." They say that if instruction should precede baptism, as this passage implies, then of course infant baptism is wrong, for it does not admit of instruction preceding baptism. It is however evident that the command to teach prior to baptism has reference only to adults. A similar perversion of the text occurred in regard to the Lord's Supper. The plain words of Christ were set aside, while certain confused and dubious expressions of the fathers were highly esteemed as decisive. Surely, error is speedily upon us if the Holy Ghost does not guide us into all truth.

Christ also says: "The Comforter will show you things to come." This prophesying is another function of the Holy Spirit, and we have many examples of its application in the Acts of the Apostles. But the Holy Ghost "shall also glorify me," continues Christ. With this declaration the Lord assures the disciples, and all believers, that their hearts shall be filled with a knowledge of God, whereby they will be strengthened to undergo all sufferings and joyfully to brave every danger for His sake. Such is the work of the Holy Ghost, which indeed cannot be fully understood if experience in faith is wanting. Christ therefore tells the disciples that for the present it suffices them to be encouraged in tribulation and to rejoice at His going to the Father; for then would come the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to reprove the world of sin, to bring true righteousness and an assurance of eternal life.

These lessons we learn from the Gospel for this Sunday.

May God, our Father, through Christ Jesus, send the Holy Spirit into our hearts, there to begin and to complete the work of salvation! Amen.

Fifth Sunday After Easter. (Rogate.) John 16:23-30.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said unto Him, Lo, now speakest Thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that Thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask Thee: by this we believe that Thou earnest forth from God.

In the Gospel today we have, as you, my beloved, have just heard, an exhortation to prayer. To pray is a part of Christian worship, secondary only to the preaching of the Word. This exhortation to prayer was made by the Lord at the supper of the same evening on which He told His disciples, while sitting with them at the table, as we saw in the sermon of two weeks ago, that He would depart from them, that they would be sad, but that in a little while He would see them again and that then their sorrow would be turned into joy. With this promise the Lord combines the admonition to prayer, as it is contained in our text; and indeed the connection of the two is very obvious; for the Christian has no other resort or comfort in sorrow and tribulation than to pray earnestly and constantly to his heavenly Father for help.

The Lord would teach us in the words of our Gospel, as He did His disciples then, never to forget prayer in the hour of distress. To encourage them to this He adds the comforting declaration: "And I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God." It is true, Christ sitteth at the right hand of the Father and intercedes for us, as the apostle Paul says. Therefore we know that His intercession for us, both on the occasion of the last supper and afterwards upon the cross, has been effective and will continue to be so until the end of time. But you need not my intercession in your behalf, says Christ, for you yourselves have access to the Father with your prayers, and ought not to doubt that they are heard, for the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved me. Yet from this it does not follow that the intercession of Christ is not of importance and full of comfort unto us, but simply this is meant, that we should have assurance respecting our own prayers because we love Christ. It is God's will, and we ought ever to know and remember it, that they who love Christ and trust in Him are beloved of the Father and will be heard by Him. It is therefore evident that the godless Papists lie when they direct us to trust in the intercession of the saints.

This exhortation and invitation to prayer by the Lord Himself is consolatory beyond measure. Our Lord and Saviour Christ made it possible for us, by His death and, departure from this world to the Father, to have free access unto God, whether we be in church or at home, in the cellar or in the kitchen, in the field or in the workshop; yea, if we are Christians and love Christ, we can under all circumstances of life come with our prayer unto our heavenly Father and pour out our hearts before Him.

All that is necessary for such prayer is for the heart to exclaim: Father in heaven, I know Thou lovest me because I love Thy dear Son, my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, wherefore I come with my requests to Thee in confidence and assurance, not indeed because I am good or righteous, but because I know that for the sake of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, Thou wilt accept of me and give me all that I need. In His name I now appear before Thee and pray, fully convinced that Thou wilt not consider my unworthiness, but wilt graciously hear my prayer.

It would be a serious mistake for the Christian to refrain from prayer until he could deem himself worthy and fit for it. The devil frequently

troubled me with thoughts such as these: I am not now ready to pray; I ought first to attend to this or that and afterwards perform my prayer undisturbed. If we indulge such thoughts which hinder and prevent prayer, we will always find something new in the way, and in the end will be entirely prayerless. The devil with his cunning tricks constantly endeavors to keep us away from prayer.

We must therefore be prepared to meet his opposition in this regard; and when troubles come we should know that now is the proper time for prayer. If we are not worthy to pray, God will make us so. He loves us for Christ's sake, and not on account of our own worthiness or righteousness, for we have none. This we fully believe.

Christ, in the words of our text, would urge us on to prayer, that we might not be like those prayerless, wicked people who, as they declare, eat and drink with much relish, though they have not prayed for a week. If we are Christians, or desire to be such, we must shun such brutish conduct. Let us, at least, pray in the morning when we arise from sleep, at the table, and again in the evening when we go to bed, saying: "Our Father who art in heaven," etc.

It is our duty as Christians to pray without ceasing, if not aloud, which is sometimes impossible, at least in our hearts. It should at all times be the earnest desire of all believing hearts that God's name be hallowed, that His kingdom come and His will be done on earth, also that He may grant peace to the country, favorable weather, health, and the like. Every true Christian wishes for such blessings every day of his life, even if he does not always give expression to his desires. Such prayer is true, earnest and spiritual; we stand constantly in need of it on account of the great dangers which ever surround the Christian on all sides, so that we are never safe from the devil, from our flesh and blood, from sin and shame.

But oral prayer must not be neglected; it ought to accompany these silent utterances of the heart. Christ teaches us here of what kind such prayer should be; He say: "Ye shall ask the Father in my name," and again: "The Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God." Whosoever believeth in Christ is a real priest with all priestly honors and dignity, so that he can assuredly come with his prayer unto God to ask Him for help in reference to his own want or that of

his fellow-men, saying unto Him: Lord I stand in need of this and my brother of that, grant us our prayer and give us what we need, for the sake of Christ, Thy well-beloved Son.

The times in which we now live are full of distress and well calculated, on account of the daily sorrow which they bring, to teach us the importance of prayer; if we but heeded the lesson and were more instant in prayer, it would be well for us. For indeed the devil, that liar and murderer, is very busy; he endeavors to crush out the Word of God with his falsehoods, and strives to arouse seditions throughout the land, with murder and rapine. The Pope and the Turk, and other tyrants, are all fiercely opposed to the Word, so that we all have enough public calamity to urge us on to prayer, even if our own private sorrow would not do it. Yea, there are causes enough, within us and around us, to convince us of the great necessity of prayer. If we are perplexed amid so great a variety of complaints, sorrows and wants which demand our prayer, let us make good use of the Lord's Prayer with its seven petitions, which include everything for which we ought to pray.

Short Exposition of the Lord's Prayer.

In the first petition, "Hallowed be Thy name," we pray for all faithful preachers, but against all heretics and unbelievers, also against the Jews, the heathens, the Turk and the Pope; for these blaspheme and abuse the name of God. We pray God to resist these His enemies, and to grant us pious preachers, who will proclaim His Word in its purity to the overthrow of all heresy.

In the second petition, "Thy kingdom come," we pray that the kingdom of death and the devil may fall. This is a very comprehensive petition; it deals with the entire domain of Satan, and requests God to make an end to it and to establish in us and others His own kingdom, by means of His Word and the Holy Ghost.

In the third petition, "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven," we pray that every will opposed to the good and gracious will of God may be prevented in its execution. The devil and the wicked are wroth against this petition; it prevents much calamity, which they would cause every day of our life, if it were not for this prayer.

In the fourth petition, “Give us this day our daily bread,” we pray for those in authority, for our parents, for our family, for the necessary food and the fruits of the field, for peace and all things pertaining to the support of our life, also that God would bless each one in his vocation and protect him mercifully from all harm.

In the fifth petition, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,” we pray that God would be merciful to and avert from us His well-merited wrath, that He would not punish us on account of our sins, but bestow on us His grace that we may become better from day to day, do His will, and live peaceably with our fellowmen, ready to forgive one another our trespasses.

In the sixth petition, “Lead us not into temptation,” we pray that God would cheer with His consolation all afflicted hearts and rescue them from their sorrows through His Word and the Holy Spirit, thus thwarting the intention and power of the devil.

In the seventh petition, “Deliver us from evil,” we pray for a peaceful departure from this world of misery, and for a happy entrance through the mercy of God into heaven above.

Thus we see how beautifully everything that we possibly need is included in the Lord’s Prayer. Its petitions contain nothing of which we do not have need every day of our life. Wants we have plenty; first those of a public nature, then those which are private and pertain to each one’s household and vocation. Therefore we have reason enough to pray, and if we do not, our negligence and unbelief is to blame. We have the distinct command to pray, as well as the promise that our prayer shall be heard. Christ even gives us of His own accord a proper form of expressing our wishes before God. This form is the Lord’s Prayer, of which we have just spoken.

We must confess that we are poor sinners, unworthy to appear before God and to converse with Him, and that we have no claim whatever upon His kindness; this is most certainly true. But in order that this conviction might not discourage us or prevent, us from praying, Christ says here explicitly that we should “pray in His name,” and adds: “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you.” Here we are taught that the whole service of prayer and supplication must rest upon Christ;

therefore every prayer not made in the name of Jesus is no true prayer, nor a service before God. The prayer of the monk, that God would be merciful unto him on account of the merits, fastings and devotions of Saint Francis or of Saint Dominic, or of any other saint, is no prayer at all, but only fruitless babbling; for it is not offered up in the name of Christ, but in that of poor, miserable mortals.

Similar is the prayer of the heathens, of the Turks, of the Jews, yea of all the Papists. They refuse to pray in the name of Christ alone and add that of the virgin Mary, of the apostles and other saints. God does not accept such idolatrous prayer; it is not efficacious. Even if they obtain what they request in such prayers, it is no blessing unto them, and it would be much better for them if their wishes had not been realized.

Christians do not pray in their own name; they know what appellation belongs to them according to the Scriptures, namely, children of wrath and liars; therefore they are ashamed to make use of their own name when they pray unto God. But because they know that God is merciful in Christ, and because they have the command to pray in Jesus' name, therefore they are bold to come to God and to make known their requests, although they know themselves to be nought but poor sinners. They venture to say: Our heavenly Father, we, Thy children, need now this, now that; be merciful and remember not against us our iniquities, but look upon Christ Thy Son, our Saviour; in His name we now approach Thee; therefore hear our prayer. When our supplication is thus made entirely in the name of Christ, it is acceptable and will be heard; it is yea and amen in Christ. This knowledge ought to make us ready and quick to prayer, for we are told that what we pray in the name of Jesus shall penetrate the heavens, even to the throne of God, who will grant our requests.

To this promise Christ adds the following words: "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name." That is to say: Thus far the disciples depended upon Him as people sometimes depend on their priests, whom they expect to pray for them, thinking that they themselves need not do it. But this shall hereafter be changed; Christ says: "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." This injunction we ought diligently to consider, that we may act in accordance with it. Sorrow, tribulation and depression will come; if we would overcome these we must pray as Christ commands, and believe

that what we ask in His name shall be granted to us, if consistent with the glory of God and serviceable to our souls' salvation.

One thing we lack, as St. Paul remarks: "We know not what to ask for, nor how to ask." Hence it happens that people often pray to God for relief from this or that tribulation, without obtaining the relief implored; for God knows better than we do what is proper and good for us. St. Paul prayed to God to take from Him his tribulation, but is answered, 2 Cor. 12: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Thus it happens to us. We sometimes desire to be exempt from this or that suffering; but God sees what is beneficial for us, and does not remove the burden from our shoulders, else we would become overbearing, proud and careless. Ere we therefore pray for our daily bread we should say: Lord, Thy will be done. Christ Himself at the mount of Olives prays thus: "Father, not my will, but Thine, be done." We should always pray in a similar spirit of resignation to God's will, nothing doubting that He will give us whatever tends to His glory and our eternal welfare.

One other fault we have in this regard. Beyond all doubt God will hear us and grant a fulfillment of our petitions, if offered up in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ; but the manner and the time of His intervention and help is not designated. If now it happens that our plans do not succeed, our reason, our flesh and blood, cause despondency within our hearts, and we are ready to despair. So also, when our hopes are not fulfilled in just so many hours or days, in which, according to our calculation, we ought to have relief, we think that our prayer has been in vain. This twofold temptation is dangerous and very apt to weaken our faith. We must therefore cling firmly to God's Word, and await His help, which is promised us in the name of Christ, and which will surely come to pass, though perhaps later than we thought and in a different way. God alone knows the proper time and occasion; He is called "*Adjutor in opportunitate*" a Helper in good time. This time, however, we must not attempt to calculate for Him according to our own wishes and feelings, but must leave its determination to His wisdom and love. We are entirely too impatient, and hence, when suffering comes, it will always seem to us that God delays too long with His assistance. Such thoughts are the same as if we would say: We know better than God when the time for help has come. Let us avoid such faithless self-conceit; let us trust implicitly the promise that God, for the sake of Christ

Jesus, His Son, will be gracious unto us and deliver us from evil at the proper time.

Such is Christian prayer, of which we stand in constant need, as shown above. In it we have true consolation and good cheer, for Christ says: "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Where prayer is wanting, there no true happiness exists, but always misery, fear and sorrow.

We have had frequent occasion, during the past years, to experience the efficacy of prayer. Without it we could not resist the enmity of the Pope and other adversaries; they would long since have wiped us out of existence. But now, because prayer prevails, he and all the tyrants who rage against the Church are continually repulsed. Let us, therefore, whose office it is to preach the Word, be unwearied in preaching, and let all Christians continue instant in prayer; then will the Church of Christ be well defended by the Word and prayer, against every enemy.

He that loves the Church of Christ and desires her prosperity, should never forget that he must do his share towards preserving her. This is done by prayer, by the earnest supplication to God that His name may be hallowed, that His kingdom may come, and that His will may be done on earth. We should also pray fervently for the overthrow of the power of the devil, that he may be put to shame, and that his nefarious plans may be frustrated. If we do this we shall, one and all, stand fully equipped and ready for the defense of the Church against the devil and the world; we shall be as the warrior who has his weapons in readiness and takes his position in the front ranks, prepared for every onset. In this regard, every Christian is a warrior who battles constantly against the devil: we as preachers with our preaching, ye as hearers, together with us, with your earnest prayer. These two weapons: preaching and prayer, cut the devil to the very quick, and by no other means but these can he be repulsed and vanquished. Besides all this, we know that it is the will of the Father in heaven that we should freely use these weapons.

I have not the slightest doubt that many wicked plans of our adversaries and the enemies of the Word of God, have been frustrated by our prayer; and if now anything which is right is to be accomplished, or if any evil is to be prevented, prayer must do it. Let us then never undervalue the power of prayer, nor suppose ourselves unqualified, or too unworthy, to make use of

it, else no one would dare to pray. Every Christian should be ready to exclaim: Since God delights in our prayer, and since we, the Church, the State and all, so greatly need it and are benefited thereby, we will pray with the Church and for her as much and as earnestly as we can, for we are convinced that it will not be in vain.

It would be wrong and dangerous to think that others may pray, but our prayer is of no account. Let us shun such thoughts, and rather say: Thanks be to God, we love Christ and His Word, and would sooner give up all things else than to deny our Lord; therefore it follows that the Father loves us and will hear our prayer, as Christ declares in our text. Nothing shall now hinder us from praying. It will indeed be well for us if we cheerfully pray in the name of Christ and have full faith in His promise: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you.”

When Christ further says: “These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs,” He does not wish to say that these instructions had been given in dubious and difficult words; for His expressions are definite and clear; but He portrays in these words the condition of the understanding of His disciples. They had as yet no experience in these things, nor did they know what kingdom Christ was establishing; all this was dark before their eyes, and when He spoke of it to them they understood not His words. But the hour was nigh when this would be changed. He says: “The time cometh, when I shall speak to you no more in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.” When the Holy Spirit comes and fills the hearts with faith and confidence in the mercy and grace of God through Christ, then will follow the desire to engage in prayer, which will be a pleasure. Without the Holy Spirit it is impossible to pray.

Zechariah therefore calls this Spirit “the Spirit of grace and of supplication.” Both belong together. God must be recognized through faith as a merciful Father, because He gave for us His Son; but this faith is a gift of God, bestowed upon us through the Holy Ghost by means of the Gospel. Where this “Spirit of grace” dwells, there is also the “Spirit of supplication,” so that we will implore God for help in suffering and tribulation, firmly believing that He will hear us for the sake of Jesus Christ, His dear Son, and that He will be with us and bless us now and evermore.

Referring to this operation of the Holy Spirit, Christ says: “At that day ye shall ask in my name,” and your prayer will surely be heard. For how could the Father, whom I have revealed unto you through the Holy Spirit, and whom you know, refuse your requests? He loves you because you love me and believe that I came out from God. True prayer must spring from such faith and confidence, else it is no prayer, even if it be couched in the most beautiful words.

May God, our Father, grant us His Holy Spirit through Christ Jesus, that we may pray to Him in every time of need, and thus worship Him in true faith, so that we may be freed from all our misery in time and in eternity. Amen.

Ascension Day. Acts 1:1-11.

The former treatise have I made, Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen: to whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: and, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, lit was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which. is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.

We commemorate this day the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, concerning which we confess in our Creed: "I believe in Jesus Christ, who ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." The celebration of this day was therefore instituted not only that we, who daily

peruse the Scriptures, might be reminded of the ascension of our Lord, but also that our children, who are constantly growing up around us, and that the common people might be taught the ascension of Christ into heaven, so that by the keeping of this festival they might learn, together with us, how it happened and what blessings flow from it.

St. Luke gives a full and vivid description of the events of this day, so that we become intimately acquainted with the time, place and persons connected with the occurrence, and can clearly understand how it all happened. We are told how the Lord, when He had tarried with His disciples forty days, mostly in Galilee, after the time of His resurrection, during which days He ate with them and taught them of His kingdom, now assembled them on mount Olivet near Jerusalem, and gave them the command, as St. Luke narrates, not to depart from the city, but there to await the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, after which they should go into all the world to preach the Gospel. When He had finished these sayings, "He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight." He thus ascended on high, with His body of flesh and bone, just as He had stood before His disciples. While they stand full of amazement at this occurrence, at this unheard of flight of a human body into the air, even as a bird would soar aloft, two angels come to them and tell them to return to their homes, that now the ascension was completed, that their Lord and Master would not return to the earth again until He came in a cloud, even as He had now ascended in one, to judge the quick and the dead. These are the outlines of the incidents as recorded in the first chapter of the Acts, and as you, my beloved, just heard from the words of our text.

In this event we ought to notice, first of all, the miraculous manner in which Christ ascended on high, how He went aloft into the air as a bird flies upwards, and then vanished out of the sight of His disciples. Surely, it is an uncommon, yea an impossible thing for men to fly upwards into the air. The human body is so constituted by nature that it tends downwards, like a stone or any other heavy material. Now Christ had after His resurrection also a real body of flesh and bone, which could be touched, as He Himself says Luke 24; yet it was a body which could, according to its constitution, move upwards or downwards at will and with equal ease.

From this fact we can learn what kind of body we are to receive after death. Now our bodies are heavy, clumsy and sluggish, but after the

resurrection we shall obtain new bodies, which shall also be constituted of flesh and bone as to all their parts, but which at the same time shall not be heavy nor unwieldy, but as easily transferable from place to place as are now our thoughts. We see how this was with Christ after His resurrection; neither the rock over His grave, nor the closed doors, could prevent His passage; He sweeps through with lightning speed, and no one knows how it happens. He appears wherever He desires to do so, and is invisible at His pleasure. Now He is here, presently He is in some other place; He walks in the air as well as upon the ground. Such excellence is also in store for our bodies after the resurrection; albeit they shall be immortal, no more in need of food or drink, and never disturbed by disease.

Let us now consider the reason of this ascension of Christ, what He wished to achieve by it, and how its benefits can be enjoyed by us during our life on earth. The ascension of Christ, His going upwards, indicates first of all, and beyond all doubt, that He will have nothing to do with this world and its kingdoms; else He would have remained here, wielding the power of earthly kings and potentates. But He leaves all this below, and ascends into heaven, where we see Him not. By this He teaches us what His kingdom is and how we should regard it; that it is not of this world, as the disciples at first imagined that it would yield them wealth and power and honor, but a spiritual, eternal kingdom, in which He distributes spiritual blessings to all who are His subjects.

Let no one become a Christian with a view of thus obtaining earthly treasures and honors. The Office of the Ministry, Baptism and the Lord's Supper were not instituted for any such purpose; nor did Christ come upon earth, or ascend again into heaven, that He might establish such a transient, temporal, worldly kingdom. He had a higher, nobler aim, which was to bless us with heavenly gifts, with the forgiveness of sins, with righteousness and everlasting life. Such are the blessings in store for us through Christ, who would not remain on earth, but ascended on high to establish a spiritual, invisible, eternal kingdom.

This was prophesied long before by the Holy Ghost in the 68. Psalm, to which St. Paul refers when he, Eph. 4, speaks of the ascension and spiritual dominion of Christ. These are the words of the Psalmist: "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among

them.” This is a brief but very comprehensive passage, which we ought to consider attentively and remember with care. St. Paul does this so beautifully and appropriately when he thus dwells upon the former portion of the passage: “Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.”

How are these words of St. Paul to be understood? Simply thus: Because we derive such glorious benefits from the ascension of our Lord, as we shall hear presently, we ought also to know the source of such grace and blessings. Neither our good works nor saintly life have merited them; on the contrary, Christ alone, by His coming from heaven, by laying aside His heavenly glory when He became man in our behalf, and finally by His death upon the cross achieved for us the enjoyment of these gifts of grace. To such benefits St. Paul refers in the words just quoted, in which he speaks of the going down of Christ into the lower parts of the earth. Such expressions are in full harmony with each other; for he who is already on high needs not ascend on high. The declaration of the Holy Ghost concerning Christ: “He ascended far above all heavens” indicates therefore that He first descended to earth and humbled Himself for us. Hence these words of St. Paul correspond well with those of the Lord Himself, which we considered a few Sundays ago: “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you,” John 16; and again John 14: “I go to prepare a place for you.” The expression, “Thou hast ascended on high,” leads us also to make a distinction between the ascension of Christ and that of others of whom it is said that they ascended. Enoch was taken on high by God, and Elijah went into heaven on a fiery chariot. Not thus did Christ ascend; He went on high of His own accord, by means of the power inhering in His person, just as He also arose from the dead by His own power, without the assistance of any other.

Here then we have a marked difference. We cannot raise ourselves from the dead on the last day, but Christ must do it, John 6; He however arose in His own strength, as He says John 10: “Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have

power to take it again.” And St. Peter, referring to this power of Christ, in his first sermon, Acts 2, says: “It was not possible that He should be holden of death.” The same distinction we observe to exist between His ascension and ours. We ascend because Christ draws us after Him; He however goes on high of His own will and power, as He declares, John 3: “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven.” The Holy Ghost pointed out this peculiarity long ago, and teaches us thereby to accept Christ as the true, almighty and everlasting God.

When the Psalmist says: “Thou hast ascended on high,” he expresses but the same truth which Christ Himself declares before Pilate, as we have seen above, namely: “My kingdom is not of this world.” We ought therefore as Christians to raise our hearts and thoughts on high, and seek first of all with diligence and great anxiety this spiritual kingdom; yea, although the field of our labor is on earth, where we have our vocation, our family, our cares for the support of our temporal existence and the government of the State, and the like, yet we ought ever to fulfill first this duty, to seek the kingdom of heaven. Do we do it? The greater portion of mankind is so absorbed, with soul and body, in the transactions of this life, that but little attention, or none at all, is given to the fact that Christ ascended on high. The Holy Ghost therefore earnestly desires to dispel this groveling spirit, and to teach us the truth that Christ did not remain on earth, but that He ascended on high, and that consequently we, even while we dwell in the body here below, should ascend to Him in our thoughts and mind, nor permit the cares of this world to burden our hearts.

Thus ought the Christians to distribute their powers. The body and the old Adam, as we have stated, may indeed be busied with the temporal work of every day life, but the heart should be engaged in seeking after the treasures of heaven, as St. Paul exhorts, Col. 3: “Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”

What does Christ do on high? Why did He ascend, and why did He not remain below? Is He idle now, or does He do anything? The 68. Psalm, already quoted, answers these queries in the sentence: “Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive. These words are exceedingly pleasant and cheering, and it would seem as if Christ referred to this Psalm when He says, Luke 11:”When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his

goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armor, wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils."

We poor mortals are, on account of sin, under the dominion of Satan and death; these two hold us in chains with such power that we are totally unable to free ourselves from such tyranny. The devil unceasingly aims at us his fiery darts and seeks to devour us. The law points out to us our sins, and accuses and terrifies our conscience on account of them to such a degree that it must exclaim in bitter anguish: Alas, alas, I have sinned against God and my neighbor, and therefore am guilty of death. Against these our irrepressible enemies we have no defense, neither of ourselves nor of others, though these be angels or saints. Christ alone is the stronger One; He comes and meekly puts Himself under the law for us and is judged by it as the greatest of sinners. He dies upon the cross between two malefactors, charged as a conspirator against the emperor and as a blasphemer of God. He thus, as a patient, innocent lamb, bears the sin of the whole world, and pays with His own life the crushing debt. Nor does He in His suffering manifest His power and majesty; He hangs upon the cross for the very purpose of enduring death.

When the law, on account of its unjust sentence, had lost all its claim on Christ and its authority over Him; when sin and death, which had thus far ruled the world, were subdued and routed by His death; when the crucified Saviour had been laid in the grave and no one had the hope, the assurance and consolation that He would arise from it, He bursts forth from the embrace of death in full glory and majesty, as we saw on Easter Sunday, and leads "captivity captive," as the Holy Ghost here declares. Yea, He breaks the power of the devil, of the law, of sin and of death; these now lose their sway, so that the devil can no longer harm the Christians, nor the law accuse them, nor sin terrify them, nor death overwhelm them. In truth, a great and wonderful change! Formerly the devil influenced and led us as he pleased; we were caught in his meshes, and thought, and talked, and acted as he instigated. Hence the law threatened us and held up before us our crimes; sin ruled with strength and committed its votaries into the merciless, all-devouring jaws of death.

This painful, cruel captivity, from which none could escape, shall forever be led captive. This is the meaning of the 68. Psalm when we there

read: “Christ has ascended on high, and has led captivity captive.” He crushed the head of the devil, the god and prince of this world, and took from him his power and cast him into prison, even into the gloomy fetters of hell, so that henceforth neither he nor his angels can injure those who believe in Christ. And though the devil rages with horrible madness and shows his teeth in blind fury, ready to bite like a rabid dog in chains, yet he can do no harm, but can only terrify us a little; for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ holds him bound, a prisoner, a culprit, judged, sentenced and damned. Therefore the devil has no authority over us, nor can he injure us, but will rather by his continual lying in wait make us more cautious to cling steadily to Christ, the Conqueror, who crushed the head of the serpent; otherwise, if the devil did not rave and threaten so furiously, we might become secure and careless. But the enemy is at hand; he neither rests nor permits us to be at peace; this makes us watchful, active and bold.

As the devil, even though vanquished and made prisoner by our great Captain, Christ, does not cease to annoy and trouble the Christians, so the law does not cease to reveal to them sin in its most hideous character. Thus it works wrath, that is, it accuses, terrifies and condemns us as transgressors of its precepts. It not only demands of us to lead an outwardly upright and becoming life, to do good works commanded in its tables, but it also exacts of us an earnest, ready and efficient obedience, that we should love God with our whole heart and our neighbor as ourselves.

If we are honest and in our right mind we must surely confess that we have not even earnestly thought of the law in this light, much less that we have thus kept its precepts, but that we have rather frequently broken them and done those things which it distinctly forbids. Then comes the judgment of the law: “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” If the law be understood spiritually and not carnally, – for he who regards it carnally becomes a hypocrite, a proud, sanctimonious pretender, who has many and grievous sins which he does not at all consider, – the heart which feels its terrible accusations is apt to conclude: Alas, I have not sinned against the emperor, or a king, or some other potentate of this world, but against the Word and command of God, the Ruler of heaven and earth; I have maliciously and knowingly neglected His mandates and despised His will, for which

iniquity He will most certainly punish me, even for ever and ever, in the abyss of hell.

In this manner the law domineers over all mankind with terror, curses and condemnation, which is indeed an excruciating, intolerable captivity, which no one can avoid. Devout and God-fearing souls experience this very often, as many of the Psalms clearly show. The hypocrites, together with the whole crowd of bad, lawless and wicked men, shall also feel this captivity, if not in this life, during the time of grace, at least in their last hour, to their eternal shame and condemnation.

Where then can we find help in this sore distress? Hear once more what the Holy Spirit says through the prophet in the 68. Psalm: "He, Christ, has ascended on high and has led captivity captive;" that is: He wrenched from the law, which, whether we feel it now, or not till death, was our greatest enemy, all its authority and power over us. The law exhausted itself when it sinned so wretchedly against Christ, its own Master, when it condemned Him as the greatest blasphemer and rebel to die upon the cross, and declared Him accursed; for thus we read the sentence of the law in Deut. 21: "For he that is hanged is accursed of God;" and the Jews cried out before Pilate: "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." But now and for ever the law lies prostrate under the feet of Christ; it is bound, condemned and executed, yea, it has lost every vestige of power over those who believe in Him; its curse is removed from these, and they also, through their faith, have it under their feet. All the law can now do is to accuse and to threaten; more it cannot do, for it has lost its sway over us, and its claim upon us is annulled; we have in Christ a Redeemer; through faith in Him we fear not the law, nor shall it now lead us into despair, for it can no longer condemn.

St. Paul speaks of this happy change in precious words, Col. 2: "He blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross." And Isaiah says, 9. chapter: "He has broken the yoke of His burden, and the staff of His shoulder, the rod of His oppressor, as in the day of Midian." And, 1 Cor. 15, the Apostle Paul exclaims: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Sin is busy still; it allures and tempts us to array us against God and to worry our conscience. Alas, often we are weak and suffer ourselves to be deceived and belied by sin, as it happened to David, the good and great man, who fell into two abominable sins. It is true, he did not continue therein, nor did he suffer death as punishment; for he believed in Christ, the coming Saviour of the world, and earnestly repented of his sins, so that they were forgiven him. Thus did sin not only lose its power over David, but it even became the occasion of making him more earnest in faith and prayer. If sin with its distressing consequences had not overwhelmed him, he would never have composed that beautiful Psalm of earnest supplication for pardon, the *Miserere*. (Psalm 51.)

Death also is still active; he delights in showing us his fangs and in threatening to devour us; and it is but natural for us to be frightened at his approach. But we ask; How is it that death does not accomplish what he desires, to slay the Christians? The answer is: Death is after all vanquished; his power is not unlimited; he is a captive, restrained by the hand of his Conqueror, Christ. With all his raving and most dreadful threatenings against the Christians, he accomplishes but this, that they will cling so much the more firmly to the Word of God, learning and keeping its precepts with greater diligence, to their great comfort and joy. Otherwise, if death did not threaten, they would not cherish the Word of God so dearly and faithfully.

These terrors and dangers, indeed, afflict the Christians to a good purpose; but they are by no means harmless. On the contrary, in their nature they are very baneful, as is manifest in their effects upon the world. But here we see and experience the importance and benefits of the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is an assurance unto us that these fearful enemies have all been subdued and that they can no more perpetrate upon Christians their wicked designs. Yea, if these were not conquered foes we would be accused and cursed by the law, condemned by sin, slain by death, and thrust into the lowest region of hell by the devil. Now however we fear them not, though they are bitter against us. The ascension of Christ is therefore a most glorious and blissful occurrence; it assures us of the defeat and subjugation of the mighty enemies, the law, sin, death and the devil. Christ has led them captive and redeemed us from their grasp; and He ascended on high, and

sits at the right hand of God, for the very purpose of defending His Christians against the assaults of these foes.

But this is not all. The Psalm continues: “Thou hast received gifts for men,” that is, gifts for the benefit of men. What gifts are these? We read of them, Joel 2: “After those days I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,” and St. John 16: “But if I depart, I will send the Comforter unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.” Similar are the words of St. Peter, Acts 2: “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He has shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.”

The office of the Holy Ghost is twofold. He brings us, in the first place, through the Gospel to a knowledge of Christ, so that we believe the forgiveness of sins in His name. In the second place, He causes us to lead a holier life, to resist and subdue sin, and to practice an implicit obedience toward God. Thus will our body and soul, our heart and all that we are, become sanctified and righteous. Though on earth we will never be entirely free from sin, on account of our depraved human nature, yet if we have faith in Christ we shall not be condemned for the infirmity which still cleaves to us, nor will our sin be counted against us. Thus does the Holy Ghost exert His influence in us.

And He does still more. He employs us also to bring others to this same grace and knowledge by means of the Word and the office of preaching. In this sense does the Apostle St. Paul in Eph. 4. quote this 68. Psalm, where he says that as a result of the ascension of Christ “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” Nor are we ignorant of the fact that the devil is hostile to the Word, especially in our time, when he urges on the infidels and the Pope, with their numerous hosts, to crush the Word and to root out the Christians. But in spite of the raging fury of the unbelievers and the Pope, the Word continues upon its course of victory; they are unable to overthrow the power of the Word and Sacraments. Here we perceive again the efficacy of the ascension of our Lord. He ascended on high to send

down the Holy Spirit for the establishing and increase of His kingdom on earth.

Another gift is this: God governs and protects His Church at all times; He comforts her in tribulation; He rescues her from persecution; guides her into all truth over against falsehood, and gives her an earnest spirit of prayer, as we heard His words last Sunday: “On that day ye shall ask in my name,” which cannot be done except by the assistance of the Holy Ghost. In short, all that we have and enjoy are free gifts of Christ, the fruit of His glorious ascension. He ascended on high to promote His kingdom, that through the Word and the Holy Ghost His Church might be established and preserved.

St. Luke in his Gospel points to this fact in these words: “While He blessed them, He was parted from them, and was carried up into heaven.” This blessing was not a mere expression of good will, a parting wish, such as we employ when bidding each other farewell. He wished them success and joy in the holy office which He had entrusted unto them, of preaching the Gospel unto all creatures throughout the world. This preaching was not ordained in behalf of trees, stones, birds or fishes, out in behalf of mankind, as is clearly evident from what follows: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” Stone and wood cannot believe, nor did Christ give a command to baptize them. As therefore faith and baptism pertain alone to men, so does also the preaching of the Gospel. When Christ uses the expression: “Preach the Gospel unto every creature,” He means that no calling or position in life shall be excluded from hearing the Gospel; that emperors and kings, be they ever so mighty, must hear, accept and believe this Gospel or else be damned. To such preaching Christ ordains His apostles; when He lifts up His hands He blesses them. He thus not only wishes them success, but helps them and grants them prosperity, and bestows His blessing in the administration of their office.

This benediction of our Lord Jesus Christ still continues, and is efficacious wherever the holy Gospel is preached in its purity, so that this preaching is not in vain. This blessing bestowed upon the disciples by the Lord, at the very time of His ascension on high, is full of consolation for us. He thereby invites us to keep in mind His going to the Father, and to rest assured under all tribulation that the blessing of His ascension is with us, and that He will employ its glorious effects for our benefit. If His purpose

were otherwise, if He were angry with us and would not use us in His kingdom, He would certainly not have departed on high with these tokens of love towards us. The fact of His raising His hands in blessing over His disciples, thereby promising them all prosperity and success in their holy office, to which He had called them, is an assurance unto us that the Lord is our faithful, true Friend, whose blessing is ever upon us as long as the Gospel is preached.

These considerations teach us, my beloved, what a happy and comfortable day this festival of Christ's ascension is unto us, and what manifold blessings flow from it. Henceforth the Son of God, who assumed our flesh and blood and overcame the law, sin, death and the devil, sits at the right hand of the Father and protects us against the many assaults of these our foes. They are indeed relentless enemies, constantly on the alert to injure us; and yet they are in captivity, led captive by our ascended Lord. Christ furthermore sends us His Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth, to protect us from error, to console us in sorrow, to teach us how to pray, and to confer upon us various gifts and graces. Christ "ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things," says St. Paul, and thus expresses the truth that we now have through our Lord all things that we need for time and for eternity. Let us therefore imitate the example of the apostles, as it is recorded by St. Luke, who "worshiped the Lord" and were filled "with great joy;" let us give hearty thanks unto our heavenly Father for His manifestation of mercy, and pray that He may keep us in true faith, so that in the end we may depart in peace from this world, following our ascended Lord into eternal life and happiness.

O Christ, grant us this in mercy! Amen.

Sunday After Ascension. (Exaudi.) John 15.26-16:4.

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning. These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you.

Our text today consists of two parts. The first speaks of the Holy Ghost; the second treats of the persecution awaiting those who preach the Gospel and confess it before the world.

You are aware that we believe the Holy Ghost to be true God, eternal and almighty. Christ designates Him in our text by an especial name when He calls Him “the Comforter.” This appellation would indicate that the Christians must be ready to endure dangers and to suffer pain; for what need would there be of a Comforter if sorrow and suffering were not our lot? The suffering of the Christians, according to the text, shall consist not only in being put to death, which would not be the severest trial of their faith, but in this also, that those who slay them shall think they are doing God service, and will proclaim abroad that their victims suffered deservedly. It is indeed a most appalling death and punishment when every one is ready to exclaim: Ah, it is right thus; this heretic has but received his dues! Thus we see that the Christians have no sympathy nor consolation

from the world; they are persecuted and slain as heretics. Sometimes they are even weak enough to think: Perhaps we acted amiss and were imprudent in our confession. Thus they are looked upon as evil-doers by the world, and are scarcely easy in their own conscience.

Christ had in view just this distressing condition of the Christians when He speaks of the Holy Ghost as a “Comforter.” By this name He tells us: I know how you will fare in the world, that you will often be without cheer and consolation; but I will not desert you then, nor permit you to perish in your misery; and when you are destitute of all comfort, when you are filled with anxiety and fear, then will I send you the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, to strengthen and to cheer you; listen therefore attentively to His words and remember them well.

There are two kinds of consolation. The one is of a worldly nature, false and deceptive; it directs man to trust in wealth, honor and power, in the friendship and favor of princes and rulers of this world. Christ teaches His disciples in our Gospel that they will not have this favor and friendship of the world, but that it will employ all its power, influence and wealth to oppose and crush them. He tells them that they ought not to be frightened nor downcast because they are in want of this kind of consolation, which is in every way miserable and unreliable; it lasts only a little while, perhaps till some fever, a pestilence, a headache, or some other bodily ailment comes – then it amounts to nothing. But, says Christ, I will give you another Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who can indeed comfort you before the world and in your own hearts, whenever you are distressed, timid, poor and forsaken. He is just what He is called, a Comforter; He brings no sorrow. Wherever sadness and grief dwells, there the Comforter has not His home. This Comforter is also called “the Spirit of truth,” because He does not comfort for a little while only, as the world does, but with an eternal consolation which deceives no man.

Our hearts are apt to contradict this and to say: We feel nothing of this consolation, but, on the contrary, we see how the world enjoys pleasure and happiness, while the Christians must suffer much. John the Baptist is beheaded, but Herod and his harlot are banqueting and full of glee. Our experience is similar. The world begrudges us every bite of bread and thinks it does a praiseworthy deed when it persecutes the Christians; but the Pope, his cardinals, the bishops, and the whole host of enemies to the Gospel, live

at ease in gardens of roses, without tribulation. Where now is the promised comfort? Christ answers: It is present; you have it with you; only distinguish between the two kinds of consolation. It is true, the world has its peculiar comfort, or it would not be so careless and jovial; but it is a lying comfort, which does not proceed from the Spirit of truth. It may happen in a moment that the world's consolation lies shattered and powerless.

On the other hand, this Comforter of the Christians is a "Spirit of truth," pouring into our hearts a consolation unceasing. Though John had not that consolation which Herod and his concubine had, though he was by them cast into prison and cruelly beheaded, yet he was not without consolation; the Holy Spirit cheered him thus: John, make thou no account of the terrors surrounding thee; despair not because thou art imprisoned and subject to the taunts of the world, for thou knowest that its pleasures are of short duration; thy sufferings, however, will also be brief and will be followed by everlasting joy, one moment of which is more precious than a thousand years on earth with all its so-called pleasures. This consolation fills the heart of John, so that he does not fear death, but praises God for his liberation from this miserable, sinful body and for the entrance into eternal life.

Whence has the Holy Spirit this consolation? "From the Father," as Christ here declares, "for He, the Spirit of truth, proceedeth from the Father." This is a most valuable passage, which proves the doctrine of the Trinity. For if the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, it follows that this Spirit is eternal, since nothing can proceed from the Father which in its essence and nature is not like unto Him. Just as God the Son is eternal because He is born of the Father from eternity, and what is born of the Father must be like unto Him; so the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father, must likewise be eternal. And again: Because Christ, the Son of God, sends the Holy Spirit, as He here declares, this Spirit must proceed equally from the Son and the Father. This article of our Confession we will, however, pass by for the present, and will treat further of it at some other time.

What is the consolation which the Holy Spirit brings? "He shall testify of me." says the Lord; that is: The devil will surely terrify and the world will persecute and kill the Christians, but the Holy Spirit will be present with His testimony to arouse faith and to encourage the wavering heart,

making it firm in Christ. The Comforter will indeed not bring us thousands of dollars in our distress, as perhaps the world would do, but He will cheer us with the Gospel and the word of promise, so that we can exclaim: Let them take all, family and home, our goods and our honor, yea, even our life, yet we will not despond, for we have a Helper above, Christ Jesus our Lord, who for us became man, and died and arose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven in our behalf, as we daily confess in our Creed. Why then should we fear? The Son of God, our Lord, who went into death for us, cannot be our enemy, but will defend and aid us under all circumstances. If He thus loves us, then surely have we no cause whatever to fear or to mistrust Him.

This consolation we find in the words of Christ: “He shall testify of me,” for outside of this testimony of the Holy Spirit concerning Christ there is no sure and abiding consolation. The words “of me” ought therefore to be written in large letters and well remembered. They teach us that the Holy Spirit, when He comes to console, preaches no other doctrine, not the law, nor anything else but Christ, since it is impossible to comfort the troubled hearts except by preaching Christ’s death and resurrection. It is certain that the urging of the law, of good works and an unblemished life, brings no consolation; it only makes men diffident and full of fear; for without Christ God appears terrible, full of wrath and ready to punish. The preaching of Christ alone conveys true consolation, which beyond all doubt makes glad the hearts and cheers them in all sorrow.

Hence it is of the first importance to lay hold of this consolation, to cling to it and to say confidently: I believe in Jesus Christ who died for me; and I know that the Holy Ghost, who is called a Witness and a Comforter, speaks and testifies throughout all Christendom of no other source of consolation for the sorrowful than of Christ; this shall comfort me and this alone. If there were any other better and more reliable consolation, the Holy Ghost would give it; but there is none; therefore He testifies only concerning Christ.

Why does the Lord in this connection make use of the word “testify?” Could He not just as well have selected some other expression? He does it to direct our attention especially to the word. It is true, the Holy Ghost works inwardly in the heart, but this working, ordinarily, takes place by means of the preached Word. Thus says St. Paul, Rom. 10: “How shall they

believe in Him of whom they have not heard?” For this reason Christ calls the Holy Spirit a Witness, who bears His testimony through the mouth and word of the apostles and all preachers who proclaim the Gospel of Christ in its purity.

Let therefore no one who needs consolation suppose that the Holy Ghost will show him Christ personally, or speak to him audibly from heaven. He bears His testimony publicly through the preaching of the Word which we hear with our ears. Through such preaching He moves the heart and testifies of Christ also inwardly. But this inward testimony is only the result of a preceding, public and outward preaching of Christ, which declares that He became man for us, and that He was crucified, and died, and arose again in our behalf.

We thus learn from our text this lesson, that if we desire to be Christians we must be content though we do not here on earth have much money, wealth, pleasure, and the like, but rather the enmity of the world, and, in addition, sin and death and an accusing conscience. When such affliction visits the Christians, their hearts are apt to despond and fear; they are then inclined to say: Why is it thus? What have we gained? Could we not have been Christians without undergoing such privations and tribulations? It is our own fault now that we are in such misery, etc. Besides, the awful examples of many well-known persons who, when they had fallen into great and shameful sins, perished in their misery, will be remembered and tend to increase the despondency. In such periods of gloom and unrest we need especially the Comforter, and we have the word of Christ for it, that He will most assuredly be present to teach us that such heavy, oppressive thoughts are not from Him, but from the spirit of evil. And this is evident enough that such thoughts terrify and lead to despair; the Holy Spirit, however, does not terrify; He consoles, encourages, and testifies that Christ has conquered the world and its ruler. Hence all thoughts which cause sadness and depression are from the devil. The Holy Ghost in testifying of Christ, how He gave His life for our redemption and arose for our justification, dispels all gloom from the heart and fills it with consolation and joy. His testimony is therefore unto us a sure proof that Christ is our Friend, that He does not desire our destruction, but our eternal salvation. All this is contained in the expression: “He shall testify of me.”

We ought to be especially mindful of this in our conflict with the sectarians and false preachers. Here we are told that the Holy Ghost as a Comforter shall testify of Christ and implant Him in our hearts. The evil spirit, on the other hand, terrifies the consciences by holding up to them sin and death. But then comes again the Holy Spirit with His testimony, which consoles and admonishes us not to look merely to sin, death and damnation, which is indeed an awful, terrific and overwhelming view, but to turn the eyes to that Man who is called Jesus Christ. Of Him we confess: He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell, and on the third day arose again from the dead. And why do we confess this of Him? Did not all this happen to Him that we might have consolation amid sin and death? Let us therefore lay aside our timidity and despondency, for which there is no good reason. If Christ were not with us, if He had not achieved for us redemption, then indeed would we have ground for fear. But now He is with us; He Himself declares: Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world. For this He suffered death, and now sitteth on the right hand of His heavenly Father for our consolation.

Wherever this truth is preached, there the voice, testimony and teaching of the Holy Spirit is heard. All other preaching, whatever it may be, is the voice of the law, or perhaps of the very devil himself, who through hypocrites, heretics and self-righteous persons often testifies and preaches, but only to the sorrow, pain and despair of his hearers. May God in mercy protect us from the devil's testimony and preserve us to our end in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, Amen. This is the first part of our Gospel for this day, which treats of the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, and of His work of consolation among the Christians.

Let us now also consider the second part, which treats of affliction and persecution. First we should mark the words of Christ to His disciples: "They shall put you out of the synagogues." These words simply mean that those who excommunicate the Christians and "put them out" of the Church, as they say, will claim for themselves authority to do so, and will boast that they are the synagogue and the true Church, and suppose themselves entitled to much praise for thus zealously serving God. For this reason Christ adds the words: "Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."

It therefore behooves us to learn what the true Church is, and to bear in mind that there are always two kinds of churches. The one has the name only, but is a false church; it claims to contain the people of God, but lies in this assertion. The other has not the name, but is nevertheless the true Church. It is difficult to distinguish these two churches; for we must admit that the false one also possesses the rightful office of the ministry. Therefore, although we hold and openly declare that the Pope and his followers are not the true Church, we must nevertheless admit that when they baptize, or ordain ministers, or perform the marriage ceremony, the office and Word of God are right and valid. Accordingly we do not re-baptize those baptized by them. Cyprian erroneously held that the baptism of heretics was no true baptism, and therefore he re-baptized those whom they had baptized. He contended that the heretics were without the pale of the Christian Church, and therefore had no right to the functions of her office. But in this he was mistaken.

We must distinguish between the office itself and the person executing it. The man may be guilty of sins and unconscientious dealings, which show that he is not in full communion with the Church of Christ; yet this fact does not justify us in regarding the office which he happens to have in the Church as of no account. We must remember that the office is Christ's, and not that person's who performs its functions. If any one disregards the command of Christ, so that he preaches and administers the Sacraments otherwise than the Lord has ordained it, then of course we deny the validity of such administrations. But as long as the order of Christ's institution is observed in the administration of the office, its efficacy is not destroyed by the imperfections and sins of the person entrusted with it.

If we would, therefore, correctly distinguish and judge these two churches, we must not confine our investigation to the office of preaching and administering the Sacraments; for the false church may also have and execute this office correctly and still be no Church. We all know how the false church with much external splendor parades the name of God and prides itself on this account. Let us not be deceived thereby. The second commandment tells us plainly how the name of God may be taken in vain; and in the first petition of the Lord's Prayer we ask that the name of God may be hallowed, which is an indication that His name is often desecrated. Be we therefore not affrighted when the false church proceeds to condemn

and excommunicate us in the name of God and of the Church, since we know that the name of God is often abused and taken in vain. And when they thus would threaten and overawe us with the use of the name of God and the power of the Church, we will remember that the greatest unbelievers can make the same attempt, or there would have been no occasion for the caution not to take the name of God in vain. Our judgment in regard to the true Church must therefore be based principally upon the fact that she is there where God's name is honored and where her glorious privileges are not abused.

That this judgment is correct we learn from the declaration which the Lord makes in our text concerning the false church; for it is evident that the true Church will not have recourse to the sword or worldly authority. The false church, however, continually takes the sword in hand and persecutes the true Church, as Christ here predicts: "They shall put you out of the synagogues, and whosoever killeth you," etc. From this we learn what the false church is, and still more plainly from the following verse: "And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor me." This is a most excellent description of the false church. It may have the office of the ministry and may boast of the name of God, but it is after all accursed, because it knows neither Christ nor the Father.

When do we "know Christ and the Father?" Not when we read mass, or put on a cowl, or fast, or give alms, nor when we perform any other similar work; but only then do we know Him, when we believe that He is the Lamb of God which bore the sin of the world, and that He in our behalf became man, was crucified, dead and buried, and that He arose again on the third day and ascended into heaven. This knowledge and belief gives consolation, and a sure confidence in God that He will be gracious unto us for the sake of His Son. Thus will we "know also the Father," when we are assured that He is merciful unto us and prepared to forgive our sins for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ. Where there is this knowledge and belief, there is the true Church, and wherever it is wanting, there is the false church, even if the office of the keys and the name of God are there. If we consider these criterions well we can make no mistake in judging where the true Church is.

The division which in our day prevails in the Church perplexes many, so that they are in doubt to which part they should adhere. Their great mistake

is that they do not apply the rule just now stated. We preach that man has no redemption from sin and death except in the death and resurrection of Christ, and that whosoever has this faith shall be saved. But he who does not believe this cannot enter heaven, though he do ever so many good works. This doctrine is taught plainly and powerfully both in the Old and in the New Testament, as we shall show to you more fully on another occasion. But what is the consequence of this our preaching? The Pope and his multitude persecute us on account of this doctrine; they excommunicate us and call us heretics, and desire to kill us, because we hold this faith. They teach that man must work out his own salvation, or he cannot enter heaven. They hold that Christ merely made satisfaction for our original sin, but that we must with good works satisfy the wrath of God for every actual sin which we have committed after our baptism. How does such teaching correspond with a knowledge of Christ? Surely, if Christ made satisfaction for our sins, we need not do it. Good works ought indeed to be done by us, but not for the purpose of thereby atoning for our sins, or of purchasing an entrance into heaven.

By this rule we can easily judge which is the true Church. We are excommunicated because we know no other righteousness and grace but that which Christ gained for us by His death and resurrection. The Pope and his church, on the other hand, seek their salvation in their own works, merits and satisfaction, which surely indicates that they know neither Christ nor the Father. Since we then have this great treasure, to know Christ aright, while they are ignorant of Him, let us be undismayed and undisturbed if they who know not Christ nor the Father anathematize us and call us the devil's church. We will rather concern ourselves with the knowledge of the Son and of the Father, because if we know God aright we are secure, and will not heed the senseless squealing of the Pope, who boasts so haughtily of his church, and hands us over to the devil.

We comfort ourselves with the knowledge that the day will come when a far different judgment will be passed upon us, when God Himself, with His unerring sentence, will declare us free from the false judgment and ban of men, and will own us as His Church before His holy angels. On earth it will ever be as Christ says in our text; there will be two churches, the one ever at war with the other. The false church has the sword in hand, and with it defends itself against all public rebuke and punishment; wherefore it is

evident that the Pope and his crowd cannot be the true Church, for of her it is said in our Gospel that she will be persecuted and put under ban: “They shall put you out of the synagogues.” Whom does Christ mean by the little word “you?” Does He not therewith designate His own beloved disciples and apostles? These shall be “put out” and killed. By whom? By those who call themselves the synagogue, the Church.

The same holds true in our day. Therefore we fear not their proscription and persecution, but patiently submit to it, knowing that true Christians and the true Church are thus proved and made manifest. We of course speak here only of those who are thus hated and persecuted because they know the Son and His Father. The Anabaptists and other sects are also persecuted and suffer much; but they do not know Christ and the Father; for they deny the blessing which God bestowed upon them in their first baptism, and establish a new kind of monkish life, with the purpose of obtaining thereby a merciful God and an entrance into heaven. The true Church, however, knows Christ and the Father; she consoles herself with the knowledge that only in Christ is God reconciled unto us; and for this consolation and hope she is persecuted. But she suffers uncomplainingly; it is nothing new to her, for Christ has prophesied this; therefore she submits, and lets the Pope with his followers call her a heretical church and the devil’s home. The true Church can look complacently on the fury of her tormentors; she knows Christ and the Father, and is well assured that the Pope and his multitude, much as they vaunt themselves, have no knowledge of God, and therefore they persecute the believers. The true Church suffers willingly with Christ, looking in faith to that time when she will triumph with Him in glory everlasting.

God grant us all this glorious triumph through Christ and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

First Sermon For Pentecost.

Acts 2:1-4.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The word Pentecost is Greek, and means in this connection the fiftieth day. Pentecost was with the Jews a great festival, occurring fifty days after Easter, and was kept in commemoration of the delivery unto them of the ten commandments, which took place at mount Sinai fifty days after they had eaten the passover and left the land of Egypt. This event was a great blessing to the people; in it God Himself revealed unto them His will from heaven, that they might know what is pleasing to Him and what is displeasing. That this great and important event might be well remembered, God commanded Israel to keep holy the fiftieth day after Easter; for thus should the people learn to value more and more the blessing of God contained in the revelation of His will and to remember the promise which they made to keep His commandments, as we plainly read in the 19. and 20. chapters of Exodus.

The events which occurred in the Old Testament, and which were of great importance to the Jews, were only an example of what should happen in the new dispensation, in the time of grace, as St. Paul speaks of it, 1 Cor. 10. The blood of the lamb with which they stained their doorposts in Egypt had no other virtue but to cause the destroying angel to pass by and to spare their first-born; the blood of our Easter Lamb, of Christ Jesus, has more

power than this: it frees us from the bondage of that most dreadful Egypt, the slavery and tyranny of the devil, and redeems us from sin and eternal death. Therefore we have a far better Easter sacrifice than they had of old. So we have in the New Testament a far better Pentecost than that which the ancient Israelites celebrated.

They received the Ten Commandments at mount Sinai. These contain a necessary, good and precious revelation of God's will, for which thanks are due unto Him; yet such revelation assists us nothing against the power of the devil, of sin and of death. The law only makes us greater sinners, and prompts our conscience to accuse and to threaten us before God, since we fall far short of doing what is commanded.

As the circumstances amid which the law was given on mount Sinai were terrible, when thunder and lightning intermingled and the whole mountain smoked and quaked, so the law still terrifies guilty hearts and makes them sore afraid, so that they tremble and know not what to do for terror. To know what God demands of us and at the same time to be conscious of our transgressions, must necessarily arouse our fears and fill the soul with anxiety; for we all know what God threatens those who break His commandments, namely, eternal death and every misery. Hence this Pentecost of the Jews is an unpleasant, terrifying feast, destitute of all happiness. It appeared so horrible and awful that the Jews implored Moses in these words: "Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die."

How different from this is our Pentecost! It has no terror, but is full of cheer and glory and happiness and joy. We have heard how the Evangelist narrates the event: When the day of Pentecost was fully come, while the Jews were busy with thanksgiving for the possession of the Ten Commandments, and considered the occurrence on mount Sinai, the apostles and other Christians were also assembled in a certain house. Then there came of a sudden a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. At the same time there appeared unto them cloven tongues like flames of fire, flickering heavenwards; and thus the Holy Ghost was publicly seen and heard. He was heard in the mighty rushing of the wind, and was seen in the flames of fire. Thus Christ had promised it, and John the Baptist had prophesied: "You shall be baptized with fire and the Holy Ghost."

This occurrence has its peculiar reason and meaning. The cloven tongues indicate that the preaching of the Gospel shall not be in vain; that it will move the hearts and kindle a new light in them, as we shall explain further on. Soon after the rushing of the wind and the appearance of these flames of fire, “they were all fitted with the Holy Ghost,” who enlightened their hearts and encompassed them to such a degree, that they immediately knew Christ aright, and understood all the Scriptures, and took such courage that they would not keep to themselves this knowledge, but preached it publicly and boldly. Besides this there occurred the glorious miracle that they could speak in every language, though before they understood only their mother-tongue. For this was the prophesy, that the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel should be at Jerusalem, and that from there it should spread abroad right quickly and boldly in every tongue, as the prophets had foretold. The Holy Ghost taught the disciples these various tongues on Pentecost, as an assurance that the Gospel should pass on beyond the boundaries of Judea and be preached throughout the whole world. This then is our Pentecost, the one of the New Testament, on which we are not afraid of God, but learn to know Him aright. We are glad and rejoice. Our conscience shall not frighten us, for Christ is our Saviour; in Him we have courage in the presence of God; and for His sake we are ready to endure all suffering, as is seen in the example of the apostles.

Christ prophesied of such a Pentecost in His last sermon, as did also the prophets David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Zechariah, and others. Let us therefore commemorate this day by preaching of the Holy Ghost, of His office and work, and how we ought to regard it if we would have a happy Pentecost and receive the Holy Spirit.

Think not, my beloved, that the Holy Ghost was not active in the Church and among men before this day. He is God from eternity, and omnipotent. Christ says: “He proceedeth from the Father,” therefore He must be of the same nature and essence with the Father. We have furthermore reliable testimonies of the workings of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men in all ages, showing that He enlightened and governed them according to the will of God. Christ says that the Holy Ghost spake through the prophets, and St. Peter makes the same statement. The Evangelists also tell us that the aged Simeon, and Anna, and Zacharias, Elizabeth, and John the Baptist, were filled with the Holy Ghost.

Hence we must think and believe of the Holy Ghost as we do of Christ the Son of God, who is from eternity and who, soon after the first promise given of Him in Paradise, began His work of opposing the devil and crushing his head. This deed, begun and carried on long before His coming into this world in the form of our humanity, Christ completed when, in the fullness of time, He became man incarnate, died upon the cross, and on the third day arose again from the dead. In a similar manner has the Holy Ghost been continually active in the world. He ever and anon brought men to believe in God by means of the divine Word; He enlightened, strengthened, comforted, and guided them into all truth.

This work, carried on secretly before, He now for the first time made public with power and might on this glorious day of Pentecost. Every one present on this occasion saw and felt the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, and had to confess it. For the few who ventured to contradict this manifestation of the Holy Ghost by saying that the apostles were full of new wine, were simply malicious liars; their reason must have convinced them that the knowledge of foreign languages is not acquired by getting drunk.

Why was this outpouring of the Holy Ghost postponed until this day of Pentecost? For this reason, that we might know this great blessing to be ours alone through Christ Jesus. He gained for us these gifts, and alone through Him can we obtain them, as we saw from the 68. Psalm, which we considered on Ascension-day. In this Psalm we read: "He ascended on high and has received gifts for men;" and St. Peter, referring to these words in his powerful sermon on this day, says: "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear."

This lesson we therefore learn first of all from our text, that the Holy Ghost did not for the first time assume and execute His work and office on the day of Pentecost, but that He has ever been active in His Church. Yet on this glorious festival He for the first time made His workings especially potent and public, that it might become manifest what a precious gift our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ obtained for us by His sufferings and death.

Another lesson we learn from our text. Just as the Scriptures designate the Lord by an especial name, calling Him the Son of God, the Word and the Image of the Father, so they also call the Spirit of God "the Holy

Ghost,” who inspires, moves and sanctifies the hearts which before were corrupt and full of sins. The Christians therefore rejoice at this name, because they are well aware of their own weakness in the conflict with the devil; they are comforted, however, since they know that they, through Christ, have on their side the Holy Ghost, who strengthens them against the attacks *of the evil spirit, who forgives their sins, and admonishes them to true obedience towards God.

How the Holy Ghost accomplishes this is taught us by Christ Himself, John 16, where He says: “And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” The works of the Holy Trinity are therefore distinguished from each other in our Creed, for the purpose of instructing our youth and the unenlightened. We confess that the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, created us for His kingdom and gave us our life and body. After our first parents fell through sin into death, thus bringing upon themselves and all their descendants the punishment of God, Christ the Son of God became man for us, reconciled the Father, and redeemed us by His death from sin and everlasting condemnation. This redemption is now proclaimed by the Holy Ghost to the world through the holy Gospel, whereby the hearts are enlightened and changed, so that they accept the truth and believe that Christ died for them, that an atonement has been made, that their sins are forgiven, and that God is now reconciled in Christ. Thus the hearts are purified and sanctified by faith, as St. Peter declares, Acts 15.

Where there is forgiveness of sins through faith, there we can rejoice and be comforted on account of the death and resurrection of Christ, even though sin is yet in us. There also will follow another manifestation of the Holy Ghost in our life; He will also sanctify our bodies, so that we will not burden our conscience with sin, nor love it and cherish it as before, but will strive to shun it and to lead a life pleasing to God. Thus St. Paul teaches when he says, Eph. 4: “Let him that stole, steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” It is the office and work of the Holy Ghost to create within us a new and true obedience towards God, so that we may withstand sin, crucify the old Adam, and obtain the forgiveness of all our sins through faith.

But this latter sanctification is not so perfect as the former, and is entirely dependent upon it. Our flesh and blood are too weak, and the devil is too powerful to admit of perfect obedience on our part; besides, we have now only the first fruits of the Holy Spirit. But what is wanting in our obedience and holiness is supplied by the other sanctification, in which we have forgiveness of sins through faith, so that we are perfectly just and holy; for the sin and corruption still inhering in us are forgiven. Thus we can understand why the Holy Spirit is so called, namely, because He purifies the believers; that is through the Word He implants in our hearts faith in Christ, whereby we have forgiveness of sins, and begin to be obedient unto God.

The Holy Ghost has yet other appellations from His various manifestations of power in us, all of which pertain to our sanctification. The prophet Zechariah calls Him “Spirit of grace and supplication,” because He moves the hearts to trust in God and to cry unto Him for help in every distress. Christ calls Him “Comforter,” because He strengthens the hearts to suffer willingly and not to be afraid of any evil, as we saw in the Gospel of last Sunday. Again Christ calls this Spirit “the Spirit of truth,” because He guards us from falsehoods and heresy, and retains us in the Word and true doctrine, against which the devil and our reason argue for the purpose of leading us astray and deceiving us.

Such are the principal works of the Holy Ghost. But He also adorns the faithful with all manner of gifts and virtues and, as Jesus declares, is a Comforter, who remains with us when the world, with its consolation, is powerless and of no effect.

Since the Holy Ghost is sent to work in us such glorious results, it is of importance for us to learn how we can obtain such blessings and the Holy Spirit, so that He may also be active in us and sanctify and save us. Christ our Saviour speaks of this in Luke 11, when He says: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?” Let us well remember this declaration, and learn that God alone gives the Holy Spirit, that He gives Him only to them who ask for Him, who are earnest in their supplication for His possession. Let then our heartfelt prayer be this: O God, grant us Thy Holy Spirit! Let us not doubt, but continue in such prayer. Christ Himself instructs us to pray thus unto our heavenly Father.

But this prayer, like every other prayer, must be in the name of Jesus. "We ought to implore God that He would give us the Holy Ghost for the sake of Jesus Christ, His dear Son. And this we can do without hesitation, as we saw on Ascension-day, because Christ went on high, unto the Father, to obtain for us this gift and to transmit it unto us.

Hence we can pray for it with full assurance. We have both the command to pray for the Holy Spirit and the promise that we shall receive Him; for Christ ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, that He might give us these gifts, which He has obtained from the Father, not indeed for Himself, but for men, as we read in the 68. Psalm.

Yet prayer alone is not sufficient. If we secluded ourselves from others and prayed for the Holy Ghost, neglecting the Word and Sacraments, our prayer would be of little value. For it is God's order that the Holy Ghost shall be efficacious only through the Word and the Holy Sacraments. If we therefore refrain from these means of grace, we will never receive the Holy Spirit. Hence we are baptized, and come to the Lord's Supper, and hear God's Word preached, and desire absolution; for we know that all these are means by which the Holy Ghost accomplishes His work in us. We have many examples to prove this. The three thousand souls who were on this day converted through the preaching of Peter, would have remained in their ignorance and sin all the days of their life, if they had not heard the Gospel; but they did hear the Word, and were moved by it, and were baptized. Christ has moreover ordained it thus. The eunuch of the queen of Ethiopia could not receive the Holy Ghost before Philip had preached the Scriptures unto him. When the Holy Spirit had moved the heart of the eunuch, it was His will that Philip should yet baptize him with water.

If, therefore, we desire to obtain the gift of the Holy Ghost we must, first of all, pray earnestly for it unto the Father in the name of Christ; then we must diligently use the Word, and remember our promise made in Baptism; we must frequently hear the absolution and go to the Lord's Supper. Through the Word and Sacraments the Holy Ghost is active in our hearts, and enkindles in them a new light, the light of faith, so that we do not simply hear the Word, as did also the obstinate Jews, but retain and understand it, and through it become different persons with renewed hearts.

Finally, it is necessary that we do not hinder the operations of the Holy Ghost in us, or even drive Him entirely from us, by a lawless, wicked life and malicious indulgence of sin. The Holy Spirit cannot occupy the same dwelling with the devil. If therefore the devil torments us with avarice, anger, lewdness, and other sins, let us be quick to pray God for His assistance, that we may overcome these terrible temptations and remain faithful unto Him. If we wish to have and to retain the Holy Spirit, we must avoid such gross sins; or if we through our natural weakness fall into them, we must arouse ourselves speedily, and not be entangled permanently in their meshes.

Then the Holy Spirit is ready to assist us, according to our prayer, in our contest against the devil, our own flesh, and sin. On the other hand, they who consciously give themselves up to sin will be possessed of the devil more and more, nor can they, without repentance, receive the Holy Spirit, whose office it is, as I have already shown, to lead us through faith to the forgiveness of sins, and to help us to resist evil and to grow in grace.

But it is also true, my beloved, as already mentioned, that after all we receive only the first fruits of the Holy Spirit whilst we live in the body here on earth. Hence it happens that they also who have the Holy Spirit are yet weak and often fall into sin. Let no one be offended on this account and say, with the Anabaptists, that he who has the Holy Spirit cannot sin. It is true, if we always heeded the admonitions of the Holy Ghost we would not fall into sin, but it is impossible for us to do this; the devil is too mighty, the wicked world too corrupt, and our flesh and blood are too weak. Therefore we must constantly pray that God in mercy may not take from us His Holy Spirit, that He may retain us in His grace, and daily increase within us the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and forgive us our trespasses, as we entreat in the Lord's Prayer. Even the saints are guilty of trespasses, but through faith in Jesus these are forgiven and become harmless.

Thus we see what the Pentecost of the New Testament is. It is a festival in which the Christians ought to rejoice, because it is far more glorious than that of the Jews. Through Christ* the Holy Ghost was poured out upon all flesh, so that we now have a knowledge of God in the light of the Gospel, and can become, by the Holy Spirit, righteous and sanctified in body and soul. Let us to this end be earnest in prayer, in hearing the preaching of the Word of God, and in an unblameable walk before men.

May the Holy Spirit, through Christ our Lord, help us in this. Amen.

Second Sermon For Pentecost.

John 14:23-31.

Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the Word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you; for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.

This Gospel is a part of the exhortation which Christ addressed to His disciples on the evening before His sufferings, and contains words of especial importance. Christ would teach us in these words how vain is the endeavor to obtain a knowledge of God and to come to Him without loving: the Saviour. Where this is wanting, our thoughts of God and our devotion are without assurance and we cannot apprehend Him. But if we love Christ we can come to the Father and He will love us.

How is it that Christ here speaks of love and does not say, as He is wont to say: “Believe in me?” Is love more efficacious than faith that He says: “If a man loves me?” We answer: The sense is the same; man cannot truly love Christ unless he believes in Him and is comforted in Him. The word “love” is in this case plainer and more forcible, because it indicates so nicely, how our hearts should turn from everything else in heaven and on earth, and should cling alone to this Man, Jesus Christ. For we know how love, according to its very nature, concentrates all its energies upon the object of its devotion, and remains attached to it, regardless of aught else in the wide world. It is the Lord’s will that we should thus cherish and love Him with our whole heart. This we cannot do except through faith. Hence this declaration concerning love does not in the least detract anything from faith, but rather instructs us as to the true character and efficacy of faith.

The word “love” is also used in this connection, because Christ foresaw with what great difficulties he would have to contend who would receive His Word and persevere in it. Manifold tribulations, which tend to arouse impatience and dissatisfaction, will present themselves. Besides these, the temptation is near at hand to think: I am myself to blame for what I endure; why did I preach and confess the Word publicly? If I had kept my peace and had exercised within myself only the faith in God’s Word and His gifts, no one would have molested me, and others, more competent than I, might have more successfully undertaken the task of a public confession and of teaching. Now I am in a great strait, for I am not only unsuccessful in my attempt, but am also in danger of losing my life for it. Such disquieting thoughts and temptations to despair cannot be overcome and banished from our hearts, nor can we immovably adhere to the Word, unless we have within us that love, of which Christ speaks in our text. Then every preacher, yea, every Christian, can exclaim: Let happen what will, I will nevertheless hold fast to the Word and will never deny my Lord and Saviour; for I enlisted in His cause for His glory, and not to please men, therefore I will endure all to the very end.

When such love is wanting, we cannot do the will of our Lord unceasingly, for He does not reward us with worldly honors and wealth, but with life everlasting. This is what Christ teaches us here. He tells us: My reward you will obtain in the life to come; therefore you must above all things have love towards me, for then you will adhere to my Word under all

circumstances, even at the risk of your life. But if this love is lacking in your hearts you will not keep my Word, but will yield to danger, adversity and tribulation, which will finally plunge you into impatience and despair.

He who knows Christ in true faith and love will not be dismayed at these adversities, but will meet them boldly, convinced of the assistance of his Lord, and strong in the knowledge that He died, was buried, and arose again for us, and that therefore He cannot be opposed to our welfare. Thus love is intimately connected with faith and overcomes all danger and misfortune, without regarding the displeasure and wrath of the world. True love concerns itself about Christ and His Word, and pays no attention to the anger of the world.

Christ refers to this when He says: "If a man love me, he will keep my words." These words are those concerning His death and resurrection, not the word of Moses or the Ten Commandments. These ought also to be revered and obeyed, as God aforetime ordered it, but they contain not the consolation of the Gospel; they do not pacify the conscience, but rather increase the dread and fear of God's displeasure; and this in proportion as we realize our weakness and transgressions. The Word of our Lord Jesus Christ, however, is the greatest and best gift. Christ says of those who possess this treasure and firmly hold to it under all circumstances, that the Father will love them.

It is a peculiarity of St. John, which is not so perceptible in the other Evangelists, to direct people first to Christ, and then through Him to the Father. And thus it must be, as Christ Himself says in our text. We must first know Jesus and love Him; we must have full confidence in His condescension and loving kindness. Where this love and confidence prevail, there there can be no doubt as to the love of the Father toward us. We will then disregard everything else that might disturb us, being assured that God is gracious to us through Christ. We will fear neither sin, the devil nor death, because God loves us, inasmuch as we love Christ.

Surely, this is an unparalleled consolation in every distress. O, that we would but earnestly entertain the knowledge and practice the belief that God is not wroth toward us, but that He kindly smiles upon us because we love Christ and keep His words. Yet it is very difficult for us to have this faith in our hearts in the time of tribulation. We are too apt to harbor the

contrary belief, that God is our enemy and cares not for us, but is ready to slay us. Such thoughts are wrong. Christ speaks the truth when He says: If you love me and keep my words; if you truly rejoice at the fact that I have redeemed you from the thralldom of the devil and the baneful power of sin; if you believe that death shall not devour you, but that eternal life shall be yours according to my Word, then will the Father surely love you also, and will manifest His love by coming with the Son and the Holy Ghost to abide with you.

This is indeed a blessed consolation, that the Christian need not concern himself how he may ascend into heaven. We are in heaven, though we be at Jerusalem, at Rome, in the field or in our houses, or any where else on earth; for God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost will come to us and abide with us. This blessing we have on earth through the Word, and faith brings it into our hearts; but after death we will also be with the Father in heaven.

The abode of God with us on earth secures us His blessing, which He kindly bestows upon all that we do in His fear and love, whether it be that we work, or speak, or suffer, whether we eat or drink, whether we arise or lie down, whether we pray, read, study or sing. This indeed constitutes a kingdom of heaven on earth. Would that we could see it as we should, and believe it. Heaven itself has not this privilege which the Christian has. God does not say that He will dwell in it, but calls it His throne and the earth His footstool. The heart of the Christian, however, if it believes in Christ and knows, in true faith, that He suffered and died for us and therefore loves Him, shall be an abode of God.

Thus all our welfare depends upon our love of Christ. This love will make all our burdens light, and will alleviate the pains and sorrows which we endure on account of Him and His Word. Else it would be impossible for us not to despair, or to be patient, or to abide with Christ, as He Himself says: "He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings."

Whosoever loves Christ has the promise that the Father, for Christ's sake, will not merely love him also, but that He will even come, together with the Son and the Holy Ghost, to abide with him. This promise is so precious and glorious that we should steadfastly cling to it, and with it we ought to be ready to suffer patiently everything that may befall us. But if we

should accept the Gospel from any other motive than the love of Christ, if we should thereby seek only carnal benefits, as the world is so apt to do, then will we, surely, not long continue to keep the Word. It is necessary for us to have this love, if we would remain steadfast in trials and dangers. Money and worldly constraint cannot produce this effect.

If then we desire to be true Christians who adhere to the Word, we should ever be ready with this declaration: We began our undertaking in the name of Christ and to His honor, therefore it cannot fail, whatever may betide us.

Why is it so important that we keep the Word of Christ and be not separated from it in danger or distress? Because Christ thus continues in our text: “And the Word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.” Christ frequently uses similar expressions, which are indeed of the utmost importance. They contain this doctrine: If man has once accepted Christ in true faith and adheres firmly to His Word, he may rest assured that the true God is his God, and that he needs none other; for God can be fully known only in Christ, as He Himself teaches when He says: “The Word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.” If therefore we accept this Word, we accept the Father; if we believe it, we believe in the Father.

Hence we can judge affairs around us very readily. The Mohammedans, the infidels, the Pope and the Jews, speak much of God, pray often, and claim to be very faithful, but it is clear that they all are far removed from the Father, and know Him not. They keep not the Word of Christ which is that of the Father, in which He proclaims forgiveness of sins and eternal life unto all who have the Son. Yea, we are even persecuted because we teach that men cannot be saved by their own works or merits, but alone through Christ.

The Lord would therefore caution and instruct His disciples in these words which we are now considering. He tells them this: If you would hear God and have Him with you, you must not turn your eyes and ears away from me. If you hear me you hear God; if you see me you see God; for thus it is ordained, that the Father is revealed and made known either through me or else not at all. Hence it is, that when Christ speaks a word of love and grace the Father approves of it also, yea, it is then spoken by the Triune

God, nor can the world or the devil resist its power. The Word of Christ is not His own, but that of the Father, as He distinctly asserts: “The Word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.”

These words are so simple that the learned of this world deem them tame and imperfect. They think that such important matters as are implied in these words ought to be more forcibly described. But if we examine carefully these simple and apparently unsatisfactory words, we will find them full of life and consolation.

This we learn from the following words of Christ: “These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” It is not the great number of words that makes the teaching plain and intelligible; if the Holy Ghost is not at the same time present with us, all will be obscure.

The remainder of this Gospel contains the conclusion of those comfortable assurances which the Lord gave to His disciples in this entire chapter, namely, that they should rejoice and be glad, and not be offended on account of His shameful death, which would accrue to their great advantage. Of this we treat more fully on the festival of St. Philip and St. James.

Let us then heed the important lesson which Christ teaches us in our Gospel today; let us keep the Word of God, and not be turned away from it by any danger. This we cannot do unless we love Christ; and if we love Him, God will also love us and will make His abode with us. This is the only way to be with God, and whosoever seeks another way besides that of love to Christ, will never see the Father, though he may suffer much and do many good works. They are all in vain.

Inasmuch as Christ tells us: “The Word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me,” it behooves every one to reject all words and doctrines which do not proceed from His lips. If we do this, we are sure to find God and to have His blessings, of which we would otherwise be entirely destitute. But, alas! it is now as it was in the Old Testament with the Jews. They had the mercy-seat in the tabernacle; there they were commanded to pray and to worship, and nowhere else; but instead of

complying with this command they selected other places as they wished, and worshiped there. Thus it is today. Christ however says: If ye would find the Father and be beloved by Him, come first to me, love me, and accept my Word.

Do the Anabaptists, the Jews, the Turks and the Pope comply with this instruction? No, verily! They deny Christ and His Word, and follow human traditions. The Pope trusts in the mass, in vows, in the assistance of dead saints. The Anabaptist trusts in outward observances and discipline, in the style of his coat and in his refusal to carry arms. The Jews and Mohammedans have likewise their nostrums. Let us, my beloved, avoid this great mistake; let us come to Christ alone and keep His Word, for the command is plain: "Him shall ye hear." And Christ says in our text: "The words which ye hear are my Father's words." It is therefore impossible that any one could come to God and be pleasing unto Him who does not first hear Christ and love Him.

May our Father in heaven grant us grace that we may love Christ and keep His "Word through the Holy Ghost, so that we may obtain eternal salvation. Amen.

Whitmonday. John 3:16-21.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

This Gospel is one of the most precious passages in the whole New Testament, and fully deserves, if it could be done, to be written with golden letters into our hearts. Every Christian ought to learn this consoling text by heart, and should repeat it once at least each day, so that we would know these words well and could readily apply them for our consolation and the strengthening of our faith. They are words which have power to gladden us when we are sad and to bring us back to life when we are dead, if we but accept them earnestly in true faith. But inasmuch as it is impossible for us to comprehend fully and to express properly the contents of this glorious text, let us pray earnestly unto God to impress these words deeply upon our hearts through His Holy Spirit, so that they may become powerful in us, and may give us much joy and consolation, Amen. The sum and substance of this glorious, comfortable and blessed passage is this, that God loved the world so dearly that He gave His only begotten Son to save men from eternal death and to give them everlasting life. Christ our Lord speaks to us, as it were, in these words: Heed what I tell you of a peculiar, unheard-of occurrence; yea, I will point you to a great, precious and valuable treasure,

which is totally unlike any earthly gifts, by which you can now be rich and blessed for evermore. All the circumstances connected with the bestowal and reception of this precious gift are so peculiar and overwhelmingly grand that human thoughts cannot compass them, and much less can our words express their great importance.

If we consider first the Giver of this blessing, we find that the text says nothing of emperors, kings, or other dignitaries of the world, but it speaks of God Himself, who is incomprehensible and omnipotent, who has created everything through His Word, who has all and preserves all and is over all, compared with whom all creation, heaven and earth, with all they contain, is but as an insignificant grain of sand. He, the Almighty, is the great Giver of all blessings, and His gifts are so glorious that the most valued treasures of men, of emperors and kings, fade away into nothingness when compared with the mercies of God. Let us, therefore, rejoice greatly and sing for gladness in view of these blessings, and let us consider as mere trifles everything else that the world can bestow. "What indeed can be greater or more glorious than the Almighty Himself!

This God, who is infinite and ineffable, manifests His loving kindness in a degree beyond all measure. What He gives He gives not as something merited, or because it is His duty to give it, but simply, as our text says, through love. He is a Giver who begrudges not His gifts, but delights in bestowing them; He gives on account of endless, divine love, as Christ says: "For God so loved the world."

There is no other virtue so glorious as love. What we dearly love we are ready to defend and protect at the risk of our life. Patience, chastity, temperance, etc., are also praiseworthy virtues, but cannot be compared with love; she is queen over them all, and comprehends them all. Surely if one is pious and righteous, he will not defraud or injure his brother, but will assist him in everything; but if we love a person, we are ever ready to devote ourselves entirely to his welfare and to assist him, according as he has need, with our counsel and our possessions. Thus, as Christ declares in our text, does God also do toward us. He gives us blessings beyond measure, not because He is patient or because we are righteous and deserve it, but through love, the greatest of all virtues. In view of this fact our hearts should awake, all our sadness should vanish, for we see before us the inexhaustible love of the divine heart, which we ought to cherish in true

faith as the greatest of all gifts, knowing that God is the highest and most glorious Giver of blessings unto us, and that they all proceed from the greatest of all virtues.

The fact that anything is given from true love makes the gift itself greater and more precious. If therefore we are convinced that love prompts the bestowal of any gift, we are well pleased; but when we doubt the existence of this motive in the giver, we care but little for his gift. Thus if God had given us only one eye or one foot and we were convinced that fatherly love prompted Him to do this, we would be entirely content and better satisfied than we would otherwise be if we had a hundred eyes and a hundred feet.

But the words are plain: God so loved the world. Therefore we ought to value highly, on account of His love, all His gifts, especially those which He has ordained to our salvation and the strengthening of our faith, as Holy Baptism, the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, etc. These gifts appear not brilliant before the world, yet unto us they are heaven itself, and make us glad and cheerful because they flow from the love of our Father toward us and are instituted for our benefit. Therefore Christ in this connection not only teaches us that God will give us something, but also in what manner He will do this, namely, through divine, fatherly love.

Thus we see how great and ineffable are the Giver and the motive which prompts Him to grant us His blessings. But the gift itself is equally glorious and inexpressible. We hear from our text that God through love does not give us a dollar, a horse, a cow, an eye, a kingdom, or even the heavens with the sun and stars, nor the whole creation, but He gives us “His only begotten Son,” who is like unto Himself in everything.

This gift must surely arouse within us the deepest emotions of happiness, so that our hearts will ever be glad and leap for joy. Even as the Giver, God Himself, is endless and incomprehensible in His love, so the gift itself, His Son, is eternal and unspeakable. God in this gift bestows Himself with all that He is, as St. Paul says, Rom. 8: “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” The victory over the devil, sin death and hell, as well as the gift of heaven, righteousness and eternal life, is ours; yea all things are ours

now, because we have the Son as our gift, in whom all else is comprehended.

If we then truly believe in this gift and accept it in real faith, all creation, be it good or evil, be it life or death, heaven or hell, must be at our service, as St. Paul in another place says: "For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." 1 Cor. 3. Indeed, if we fully consider this gift, we must confess and say that it is a boon which in value transcends all else in heaven and earth, and in comparison with which all treasures in the world are as a mite to a mountain of gold. But alas, our miserable unbelief and the terrible darkness which enshrouds us, as Christ Himself shortly after this complains, prevents our hearts from realizing what a blessing we have in this gift of the Son of God; we hear these glorious words, but they rush by our outward ears, and the heart remains cold and cheerless. When we hear of a house or farm which is for sale on easy terms, we run and are as eager to make the purchase as if our existence depended upon it; but when the glorious Gospel is preached, that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son for its salvation, we are shamefully and sinfully careless and lazy about hearing and accepting this blessed truth. Who is at the bottom of this wicked indifference and carelessness as to the greatest gift, so that we do not accept it nor derive from it joy and consolation? No one but the old devil himself; he blinds our hearts to such a degree that we permit the preaching of this precious Gospel to go by unheeded, while we in the meanwhile busy ourselves with temporal cares.

For this reason I remarked, at the beginning of this sermon, that we ought to repeat these words when we get out of bed in the morning and again when we retire in the evening, so that we may know them right well and praise God for His unutterable blessings. For surely all, the Giver, His love, and the gift bestowed so undeservedly, simply through love, are most glorious and beyond our comprehension. The gift is one freely given, and will ever remain a gracious blessing which cannot be borrowed, lent nor bought; all we have to do to obtain it is to hold out our hand and to receive willingly and gladly this treasure. Alas, that our hands and hearts are so reluctant and even unwilling to take such a glorious gift, which is so freely offered, and which is designed to be ours for evermore.

What shall those people be called who refuse to accept a kind gift and blessing? Suppose a poor, ragged beggar, nearly exhausted with hunger, meets with a great and charitable prince, who offers to give him a residence and a great yearly income, and to make him a lord, but that the beggar haughtily turns away from his benefactor without accepting his kindness, what would this foolish man be called by the world? Surely everybody would say that he is crazy and acts more like a brute than a human being. This would be the verdict of the world. Here, however, there is offered to the world no palace nor principality, no kingdom nor imperial domain, but the Son of God, and God Himself urges the world to accept and keep this gift. But alas, we men are the ones who refuse to accept this gift; we turn our backs upon God, the kind Giver. From this we can judge what a great and horrible sin unbelief is, for it is not natural that men should refuse a gift and willingly turn from it.

This proves how mad and thoughtless the world is; she does not rejoice at this gift of God, and refuses to receive it when offered. No doubt she would be quick to stretch out her hands for it if it were a dollar or a new coat; but as it is the Son of God every one acts as if the gift were valueless.

“The world” is mentioned by name in this connection as the ungrateful one who spurns this gift which is offered to her freely. For what has the world done to merit such love and mercy of God? Nothing at all. She is the devil’s bride, the greatest enemy of God and the greatest blasphemer. Yet we read here: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”

My hearer, inscribe this truth deeply in your heart. And since you have now heard who God is, and what His gift is, which He gives alone through love, hear also what the world is. She is constituted of a multitude of people who do not believe in God and who make Him a liar; yea, they blaspheme His name and Word, and persecute it. Hence they are those who disobey father and mother, who are murderers, adulterers, treacherous persons, thieves, hypocrites, and the like, as we, alas, can see but too clearly every day of our life. The world is full of falsehood and blasphemy. Nevertheless God, through love, gives His Son to this bride of the devil, His greatest foe and persecutor.

This fact also magnifies the gift. God does not regard the sins and crimes of the world, nor her persecution of His name and Word, so as to withhold His gift on that account. It would seem as if God were too holy and His gift too precious to endure the perversion and wickedness of the world. But God does not regard the sins of the world, whether they be against the first or against the second table of the law, as too great to permit the manifestation of His love toward her; yea, on account of her sins and great misery, in which we all would have to perish if God did not grant us His help, He is merciful, and prompted by His love He comes to our assistance.

Ought we then not to love such a merciful God in return and to trust implicitly in Him who forgives sins, and will not suffer the ungrateful world to perish for her transgressions, which are innumerable? Yea, the sins of every one of us are innumerable; who then could enumerate the sins of the whole world? Yet we read that God is ready to forgive all our transgressions; for from the love of God comes the forgiveness of sins. We ought to consider this attentively. If God gives so much, yea even Himself to the world, which is His natural enemy, we are forced to conclude that His mercy and grace will also manifest itself toward us, no matter what our experiences are during this life. Therefore we ought to trust in this love, and hope for every blessing from God for Christ's sake.

Such thoughts must encourage the heart and make it glad. I and many Christians have to confess that while we were in popery we lived in great wickedness and idolatry, and were guilty of many a sin. God however did not punish such wickedness as we deserved, but manifested His love by revealing again through the Gospel His Son, whom He had given to the world. We were again permitted to hear and to understand the glorious Gospel, proclaiming that God is not wroth with the world, but that He loves us and has given His Son in our behalf. Alas, we are ungrateful and do not realize this truth as we should, else would our hearts be filled with joy, and we would be determined not only to serve God right willingly, but also to suffer without complaint everything in His service, on account of the precious treasure which we have. It is our unbelief which prevents such joy and seeks the pleasures of the world, which come from the devil and are accursed.

We have now considered four parts in our text, namely, the Giver of the gift, the gift itself, how it is given, and to whom it is given. It is impossible

to express fully in words the great importance of these four considerations.

Now follows the *causa finalis*, what purpose God has in view in the bestowal of this gift. It contains no outward advantages for us; we are neither clothed by it, nor fed, nor sheltered: much less is it injurious to our bodies; it contains no poison. Thus He gives His Word, Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar, not to our injury but to our salvation. This gift of the only begotten Son is granted unto us to this end, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

From this declaration we learn that this gift does not bring us money, goods, honor or power in this world, for all such benefits would be but transitory. Yea, if we had all these things we would nevertheless still be under the dominion of the devil. But now when the Son of God is given us, through the Father's love toward us, it follows that we are freed from sin, death and hell, if we believe in the Saviour; for He crushed the head of the serpent and despoiled it of its power; He slew sin and devoured death and extinguished the fire of hell, so that they are all vanquished for evermore and deprived of their supremacy over us. So great and glorious was this gift. Honor, praise and glory be unto God, the merciful Giver of this blessing, for ever and for ever, Amen.

Surely we have reason enough to feel happy at this occurrence, especially since Christ Himself asserts in our text that He was given us to overpower hell and to make our timid hearts bold and full of cheerfulness. Through the firm assurance that we have a reconciled God in heaven, who loves us and who through love gave His Son for us, so that we should not perish but have everlasting life, we are made glad; for we know that death has now no authority over us, and that eternal life is ours in Christ.

This truth we cannot learn or understand too well; therefore we ought to pray every day that God may through His Holy Spirit inscribe these words deeply in our hearts, that these may be illumined and enlivened thereby. Then will we become true theologians, who know Christ aright and adhere to His doctrine, prepared to suffer for this faith all ills and adversities which, in the providence of God, may visit us. But inasmuch as we do not value these words as we should, and only hear them with our outward ears, they cannot prove their power in our hearts; we remain today as we were yesterday, and it is a sin and a shame that we see not with our eyes nor hear

with our ears. Most certainly will the damned cry out on the day of judgment and lament, because they were so careless about the preaching and hearing of these words of consolation while yet on earth.

Let us now consider in what way this glorious gift ought to be received, in what receptacle this precious treasure should be securely laid and guarded. It is of great importance to know this. Christ Himself points it out to us in the words: “That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

This testimony is plain and clear. It declares that faith, that is, a firm confidence in the mercy and love of God in Christ, is the receptacle into which we should receive and in which we should keep the gift of the Son of God. Love and mercy prompt God to give us such a boon, while we can receive and retain it only through faith. No work or merit of ours avails us anything in this; for even our best works are worthless in this regard. We must stretch forth our hands in faith; and as God through love is the Giver, so we must through faith in Christ be the receivers of His gift. We must believe what our text tells us, that God is kind and merciful and that He manifests His love toward us in sending His only begotten Son into our flesh and blood, to take upon Himself our sins, as John the Baptist and the prophet Isaiah declare: “This is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.” With such a gift, and assured of the love of God, we can stay our hearts against the assaults of sin and the accusations of our conscience; for we know that He is not wroth nor terrible, but that for Christ’s sake He is kind and gracious unto us. Whoever believes this is truly happy and blessed, for this gift is so great and powerful that it crushes sin, death and every evil. As a burning fire devours a little drop of water, thus are the sins of the whole world annihilated when they come in contact with Christ; yea, if we cling to Him in faith, our sins will be removed and destroyed, even as a straw is devoured in a mighty conflagration.

Christ Himself tells us in our Gospel: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The words “whosoever believeth in Him” are of especial importance here. Christ says nothing at all of good works as means unto salvation. Faith alone can and must receive this gift. Therefore we are undisturbed by the noise of our adversaries; we cling firmly to this doctrine, for here it is said: “Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish,

but have everlasting life.” If we doubt this, or change it, we accuse Christ of falsehood and set ourselves up as judges over Him.

What glorious words of consolation and eternal life! God grant that we may faithfully receive them into our hearts. Whoever has accepted them in faith will not fear the devil, nor sin, nor death, but will exclaim, in great joy and firm assurance: I am comforted, for I now have the Son of God given unto me through the Father’s love toward the world. This I firmly believe, because the Word of God, the holy Gospel, thus declares it unto me. And Thy Word, O God, and Thy Son Jesus Christ cannot lie; this I know and believe. Wherein I am weak in faith, give me strength to receive and to retain this Thy great gift and love, else it will be of no advantage unto me. It behooves us therefore to become more and more acquainted with this gift and to be comforted by it; this however can only take place through faith, as Christ teaches us. The stronger our faith, the greater will be our happiness and safety, so that we can cheerfully do and suffer what God imposes upon us, and this because we know that He is merciful and full of love toward us.

Perhaps you will object and say: Yea, if I were as pious and holy as Peter, Paul, or the holy Virgin, then would I dare to believe and be comforted with this gift. They were saints, and no doubt for them this gift was intended, but I, a poor sinner, have no right to appropriate it unto myself, for I have so often and in such manifold ways offended and opposed God. Such thoughts cannot be avoided when we hear this Gospel, and then think of our condition and great transgressions. But we must watch that these thoughts do not gain such power over us that we lose sight of the Gospel; to this we must speedily return and in this find comfort. Such thoughts are really nothing but unbelief, which would keep us from this gift and its comfortable assurance of the forgiveness of our sins through faith in Christ. Unbelief, however, can be successfully combated only with the Word of God. Christ our Saviour gives unto us this Word, so that we dare not doubt its truthfulness. He tells us that His Father in heaven, the everlasting God, so loved “the world,” that He even gave for it His only begotten Son. Now it is evident that the expression “the world” does not mean Mary, Peter, Paul, etc., but that it includes the whole human race, one and all, without any exception. Or have you any doubt that you are a human being? If so, feel your chest or your nose, and you will find out whether you are different from other people. Why then will you persistently exclude

yourself from the application of this expression “world,” when Christ so plainly includes in it all men, and does not apply it merely to the virgin Mary, to St. Peter, or to St. Paul? If you and I refuse to accept Christ, because we think that we have no part in Him, we make Him a liar, for He said that He was given for the whole world. No, we must rather come to the opposite conclusion, that we have as good a right to this gift as Peter or Paul, or any one else has, simply because we are men, and as such a part of the world. Let us therefore beware and not doubt God’s words by thinking that we cannot be sure whether we belong to those, to whom and for whom He gave His Son that they might have everlasting life. With such thoughts we deny that God speaks the truth.

Let us therefore shun such doubts, and the thoughts producing them, as we would shun the very devil himself. Let us be firm in faith and say: We know that God gave His gift not only to Peter and Paul, for if He had desired to bestow it only upon those perfectly worthy of it, He would have given it to the holy angels, who are pure, undefiled spirits, or to the sun and moon, which obey perfectly the law of God by continuing in their prescribed course; but we read otherwise, namely, that “God gave His Son unto the world.” Therefore we all have a part in this glorious gift, just as well as David or any apostle. Who was David? Did he not commit gross sins? Who were the apostles? Were they not all sinners and unworthy of this gift?

Let no one, therefore, reason thus: I am a sinner, and am not as holy as St. Peter, consequently I dare not appropriate this gift to my consolation. Far be it from us to harbor such thoughts. Let us believe in God’s Word implicitly; and because He says that He gave this gift unto the world, let us all, since we belong to the world, no matter who we are, lay hold of it in faith; for if we do not, we deny the truthfulness of God, and thereby commit a great and damnable sin.

Some perhaps might think: If God had told this unto me especially, I would believe it and be assured that it also applies to me. In this you err, my friend; God intentionally speaks in a general way, and says that He gave His Son unto the whole world, that all may be saved and none be excluded. If there are any who are not benefited by this gift, they are themselves to blame; they exclude themselves, through wicked unbelief, from the blessing of the gift of God, and will have to render an account for their faithlessness;

yea, their own words will condemn them. Besides, we have the holy Sacraments, instituted of Christ Himself, to be employed by us as means of grace, by which we are to obtain and to appropriate to ourselves this gift. This is a brief and simple explanation of our beautiful and precious text today, which is so comprehensive that it can never be exhausted. It contains the chief doctrine of salvation, that God, through love towards the wicked world, gave His only begotten Son to be its Saviour. Let every one learn what a glorious treasure and consolation the Christians have, who God is, and what the world is, and how through faith we can obtain and enjoy this mercy, as Christ says: "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." The doctrine concerning good works and their relation to faith cannot be considered in this connection, and will receive attention at some other time. Here we must consider what God gives unto us and how we ought to receive His gift.

Christ does not dwell here upon the duties which a Christian must fulfill to prove himself an obedient, beloved child of God, nor does He speak of the necessary gratitude for the love of God and the gift of eternal life. It suffices, therefore, if we in this connection restrict our consideration to the mercy of God, and to the truth that we are saved alone through this grace, which must be accepted in true faith, and with which good works on our part have nothing to do; for we are saved only through the love of God who gave His only begotten Son for us, for whose sake He now forgives us all our sins.

God grant us His grace, that we may believe this truth and be happy in it in life and in death. We ask this for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Volume 3

First Sermon For Trinity Sunday. John 3:1-15.

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That Which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto Him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

This festival is so important that much can be said concerning it. In the first place, the Gospel Lesson itself is very comprehensive, and teaches valuable

truths; then, again, it is necessary, on this occasion, to speak about the doctrine which this festival commemorates, and to treat of that chief article of our faith, according to which we Christians alone, among all other people on earth, believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

This article of our faith is the most important in the Church, and was not invented by man, but came to us by divine revelation. The other festivals of the church year present to us the great works of God, in which we can recognize His will and mercy towards us. On Christmas we celebrate the fact that God became man. On Easter we commemorate the resurrection of Christ our Lord, who by His own power, as true God and man, raised Himself from the dead. On Pentecost we remember how the Holy Ghost descended visibly upon the apostles and began His work in them and other believers. In like manner all the other festivals exhibit unto us God as manifest in some work upon earth.

The Trinity festival, however, is instituted for the purpose of learning from the Word of God who He is in Himself, in His divine essence, aside from His work. To learn this, we must rise above everything which is created and to which we are accustomed, and view things greater than the angels and heaven itself, and listen only to what God says of Himself and His real being. True, the world, because it cannot comprehend this doctrine, in its supposed wisdom rejects it as foolishness, and mocks at the teaching, that in the one eternal God there are three distinct persons. Those who preach and believe this doctrine are considered by the world as lunatics.

Thus it came to pass that this article, although most clearly taught in the New Testament, was ever opposed in the most violent manner, so that already the Evangelist John had to write his Gospel in defense of it. So soon appeared the heretic Cerinthus, who, having learned from Moses that there is but one God, immediately concluded that Christ could not be God, and that God could not become man. Thus he babbled, prompted by his reason, thinking that as he reasoned on this subject so it must be.

But shame upon thee, unclean reason, for by thy light we can not even tell what we ourselves are. No man ever born on earth can explain, how he can see with his eyes or speak and laugh with his mouth; and yet man is so bold and impudent that of his own knowledge and in his own wisdom he talks and disputes about God and His divine being. Is not this the height of

folly? I cannot explain how I can see or laugh, and yet I venture to understand and speak of that about which I know nothing at all, unless it is revealed to me by the Word of God? Yet the world thinks itself smart in this respect, and Turks and Jews call us Christians fools for believing that Christ is God. Following my own wisdom, I might also think and say: there is only one God, Christ is not God. But when the Word of God comes with its teachings, such thoughts and expressions fall to the ground.

It behooves us now to consider well this subject. Though we cannot speak perfectly of this doctrine, yet we can, like little children, stammer about it, repeating what the Scriptures declare: that Christ is true God, that the Holy Ghost is true God, but that there are not three Gods nor three beings, as we would speak of three men, three angels, three suns, or three windows. No, not thus is God distinct in His essence, for there is only one divine being. Therefore, though there are three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, yet they can not be distinguished nor separated as to their essence, since there is but one God in one indivisible, divine being.

St. Paul thus speaks of Christ, Col. 1:15—17: “Who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature: for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.”

From this we learn, how St. Paul subjects everything to Christ. If then Christ is above all creation, it follows that He is true God; for out side of creation there is nothing else but God. Therefore Paul calls Him the image of the invisible God. But He cannot be the image of God, if He is not equally almighty, equally eternal, wise, just, merciful, etc. Christ would not be the image of the Father, but would be unlike Him, if He fell short in but one of these attributes. Hence we have inevitably the double conclusion; first, if the Son of God is the image of the Father, He must be fully of the same divine essence with the Father; and secondly, the distinction of the persons must remain, that the Son is not the Father nor the Father the Son. The persons are distinct from each other, inasmuch as He who is begotten cannot be the one who begets; yet there is but one divine essence, else the Son could not be the image of the Father. More we cannot say in regard to

this. The matter is too far above our comprehension to express it in more intelligible language, and we can only stammer about it as long as we are here upon earth.

When the Jews and Turks ridicule us, and charge us with placing on the throne of heaven three brothers who conjointly exercise authority, we might easily follow their example, if we would disregard the words of the Scriptures. But they misrepresent us. We say nothing about three men or three angels, but we teach one divine essence, *et simplicissimam unitatem* (a most complete unity), over against everything that is on earth. For even body and soul are not so intimately united as God is in Himself.

If it be asked, What is the name of this one God? we answer in the words of the Scriptures, and say: His name is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. For the Scriptures teach us that God from all eternity, before the foundation of the world, begat a Son who in every respect is like unto Him, equally eternal, equally almighty, equally just, etc. Therefore St. Paul calls Him the “image of the Father.”

St. Paul further says 1. Cor. 10:9: “Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.” Let us carefully note this expression and compare it with the account that Moses gives of that occurrence, and we will be astonished to see, how nicely Paul and Moses agree with each other in this matter. Moses says, Numbers 14:22: “This people has tempted me now these ten times.” It is the one true God who thus charges Israel with tempting Him, for the name used here is never applied to anyone else but to God. Paul in explanation of this tells plainly who this God was, namely, Christ; for he says: “Let us not tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted Him.” This proof cannot be refuted. Paul says that Christ was the God whom those people in the desert tempted, and Moses says that it was the one, true God. But surely, Christ was not yet born at that time, nor Mary, nor David. Nevertheless Paul declares that the Jews, who were then in the desert and not yet in the land of Canaan, tempted Christ, and warns us not to do the like, lest we fare as badly as they did. These words show plainly that Christ is the same person of Whom Moses writes: that He is the one, eternal, almighty God. Thus we see how Moses and St. Paul, though each one in his own words, declare that Christ is the true, eternal God.

Similar testimonies are frequently found in the New Testament, from which it is evident beyond dispute that Christ is God, and yet a distinct person from the Father, because He is begotten by Him. Designate this as you may, we call Him a distinct person; but our words will always be incapable of fully expressing it. The Father and the Son are not the same person, and yet they are one and inseparable in essence and in their nature; so that it follows that all the attributes pertaining to the Father belong also to the Son, with the single exception that the Father has begotten the Son, from eternity, not the Son the Father.

Again the Apostle Paul, Acts 20:28, when he had blessed the Ephesians at Miletus, says: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood." This passage is plain, and says that Christ, who has purchased the Church through His blood, is God; for the Church has but one Lord whom she acknowledges as such, even God. If Christ has purchased her with His own blood, and she now belongs to Him, He must verily be true God. Again, since Christ has purchased the Church with His own blood, it follows that He is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also in time born into the world of the Virgin Mary. For Paul says here to the deacons or pastors: Remember that it is your duty to feed the Church or flock which God purchased with His blood. From this we also see that we have a most glorious office, in which we dare not oppress others or teach them human traditions, as does the pope and his crowd, but are ordered to feed the flock with the pure doctrine of God's Word. May He, who has purchased His Church with His blood, in mercy grant us the ability so to fulfill our office that His name may be hallowed and His Church may be built up. Amen.

Similar passages are plenty, especially in the Gospel according to St. John, which very plainly declare that Christ is the true, real, eternal God, although Father and Son are two distinct persons. The New Testament has many such proofs, and also the Old Testament, though in the latter they are somewhat more obscure. St. John in his Gospel calls Christ, in regard to His eternal existence, "the Word," and thus coincides with Moses, who begins with the declaration that before the creation God had with Him the Word, equal with Him in power, and that God through that Word created all things. Hence God and the Word must be one essence, for both are eternal and

almighty, though He who speaks the Word and the Word spoken are two distinct persons.

The patriarch Jacob, Genesis 48:15. 16., makes the same distinction in regard to these persons when he says: “The God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads, and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” Here the term Angel is applied to Christ, not because He in His nature and essence is an angel, for it would be idolatry to invoke an angel and ask for his blessing, and the invocation is a confession that He is the real, true God; but His form of existence should not always be precisely the same as that of the invisible God, but He should be clothed in human flesh and be sent upon earth to be sacrificed for our sins. Christ Himself often speaks thus in the New Testament: “The Father who hath sent me.” Again: “As the Father who hath sent me.” And in the prophet Isaiah, 61:1. we read: “The Lord God has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted.” Also Isaiah 63:9, “And the angel of His presence saved them.” In the same manner Malachi calls Christ “an angel of the Testament.” Mal. 3:1. From these quotations we see how the expressions, God and Angel, represent two distinct persons, while they are one and the same essence. For surely the Angel is also the real eternal God, else Jacob would not invoke Him; but He is called “Angel” on account of His office and work, which is placed upon Him by the Father.

This is asserted by all the passages in the Scriptures, where mention is made by the prophets of the Seed of the Woman, that He would bring blessing unto us, establish an eternal kingdom, redeem us from sin, and prepare for us a life eternal. These are all works that cannot be done by any creature, but God alone can do them. Since these works are by the prophets ascribed to the man Christ, it must surely follow that Christ is the true, almighty God, as it was said to Philip, John 14:11 : “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me: or believe me for the very work’s sake.”

Thus also says Isaiah 9:6: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.” That the prophet here means a person who has a natural body and life is evident. But he continues to say of this person: “Of the increase of His government and place there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever.” Now I ask, is it not plain enough from these expressions “Prince of peace,” “judgment and justice,”

that this man to whom they apply, shall be able to forgive sin, and to protect His people and rescue them from all sorrow and evil, while at the same time He is truly called a man, a son, born as a child. And yet it is also declared of Him that He has an eternal kingdom, “established with judgment and with justice from henceforth and forever;” from which it follows that this man is also the true, almighty, and eternal God.

Many passages from the prophets apply here, in which they plainly call Christ God; thus in Psalm 68:23 and 31; also Hosea 3:5: “Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.” In this passage the prophet uses the words “God” and “David the king,” indicating thereby two distinct persons, since he evidently with the latter expression points to Christ, the Son of David as to the flesh. But he also considers these two persons as one when he says “that the house of Israel shall seek them,” for what else would it be but idolatry “to seek,” that is to worship, David, unless by the term David, that is Christ, the Son of David according to the flesh, the one true God is meant. This is clearly shown by the concluding words: “They shall fear the Lord and His goodness.”

Christ Himself, when He, Matthew 22, cites Psalm 110, over against the Pharisees, wishes to prove that from this Psalm it necessarily follows, that He is not only the Son of David, but also the Son of God, or the one true God. These and other similar testimonies must be carefully remembered by us, so that we may be able to resist the devil and his false doctrines.

We now proceed to notice similar declarations concerning the Holy Ghost, showing that He is true God, although He is a distinct person, that is, He is neither the Father nor the Son, though, as to His essence, He is entirely equal to both. Thus our faith can be strengthened and fully assured that we adore but one God, eternal and omnipotent, and not three Gods (as the Jews and Turks maliciously lie about us). At the same time we hold to the belief that there are three distinct persons; namely, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

It is indeed a source of great thankfulness unto God for us Christians that we have, in regard to this all-important doctrine, such glorious, clear, beautiful and indisputable testimonies in the Holy Scriptures, upon which we can rest our belief and bid defiance to the devil and the world. We are

not forced to take the testimony of men in this matter as proof of our faith; Christ Himself declares in the most positive manner that the Holy Ghost is true God, else He would not have given His command in regard to baptism in the form He did, saying, “Baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” These precise words of Christ make it plain enough that the Holy Ghost is necessarily true God, equal in power and majesty, from all eternity, to the Father and the Son; for surely Christ, if it were otherwise, would never have given Him equal rank with the Father and Himself in a work that pertains to the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Christ says, John 14:16. 17: “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him.” This passage is very important, for in it we find fully expressed the distinction as to the three persons. “I (says Christ) will pray the Father.” Two persons, are thus mentioned : Christ the Son who prays, and the Father who is implored to give another Comforter. If the Father is to send such a Comforter, the Father Himself cannot be this Comforter. Nor can Christ, who prays for such a Comforter, Himself be the Comforter; for He says: “He (the Father) shall give you another Comforter.” Three persons are therefore plainly taught in this passage; no one can gainsay that. Just as the Father and the Son are two distinct persons, so the Holy Ghost, as the third person, is distinct from the Father and the Son; but there is, nevertheless, only one true and eternal God.

Concerning this third person Christ says, John 15:26: “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me.” This passage not only describes the office and work of the Holy Ghost, but also His essence, in declaring that “He proceedeth from the Father.” That means, that His proceeding is without beginning, eternal, for the Father, from whom the Holy Ghost proceedeth, is without beginning and eternal. For this reason the holy prophets call Him the Spirit of the Lord. Thus you heard it said on the holy day of Pentecost, when St. Peter cited the expression of the prophet Joel: “And it shall come to pass in the last day, says God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,” etc. Here notice carefully the words: “I will pour out of my Spirit.” In God every thing is eternal, omnipotent, holy,

wise, good and immortal, for these attributes belong to His being; therefore when Christ says of the Spirit “whom I will send from the Father,” He declares that the Holy Ghost proceeds not only from the Father, or that He is but the Spirit of the Father, but that He at the same time is also the Spirit of the Son, as St. Paul and St. Peter clearly call Him, Rom. 8. and 2 Pet. 1, “the Spirit of Christ.” No one can send the Holy Ghost except God, whose Spirit He is, and from whom He proceeds, etc.

There are many other Scriptural passages, which the fathers of the Church have employed as proofs for that glorious article of faith, which they have maintained in spite of the devil and the world, and in which we confess one God in three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, who is such from all eternity, and not, as the heretics foolishly teach, that these three names mean but one person, who in time manifested Himself in three various ways.

No doubt, this article of our faith seems foolish to reason. But that is of no importance. If it were proper to be critical with our human reason in this matter, I venture to say I would be able to practice such criticism with more skill than the Jew or the Turk. But I thank my God that He gave me the grace to have no desire to dispute concerning this article whether it be true or consistent; but because I find it well grounded and taught in the Scriptures, I believe God more than my own reason and thoughts, and care nothing for the objection, that it is unreasonable to teach the existence of but one essence in which there are three distinct persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

The question here is not whether this doctrine is true, but whether it is found in the Word of God. If it is found there, then be assured that it is true, for God’s Word is truth. Since the Holy Scriptures have this article of our faith, as we have just now seen, and since our fathers so earnestly contended for its preservation, and have handed it down to us in its purity, we should not doubt nor attempt to investigate with our reason how Father, Son and Holy Ghost can be one God. We poor human creatures cannot even comprehend, though we have the help of ever so many wise men of this world, how it happens that we laugh, or can see a high hill many miles away, or how sleep overpowers us so that the body seems dead and is yet alive. If we are thus unable to understand matters pertaining to our own life and daily experience, why then, prompted by the devil, should we venture

with our own reason to comprehend God in His majesty and divine essence! If we must speculate, let us begin with our own selves, and find out what becomes of our eyes, ears and other senses when we sleep. Speculation in this direction might at least be indulged in with out harm.

It will never do to attempt to explain and comprehend this article of our faith with our reason, for we cannot understand how three can be one. We simply take the Word as it is, and it declares concerning Christ that “He is the image of the Father and the first-born of every creature,” from which it follows that He is not created, but is God from all eternity. Other passages, especially in St. John, contain the same truth: “The Father has made all things subject unto me. Whosoever seeth me, seeth the Father. Doest thou not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” Such expressions cannot be explained away; they mean what they say. God Himself has asserted that there is no difference between the Father and the Son, except that the Son is begotten of the Father. How this is possible, we know not; we only know that the Scriptures declare: “That He is the first-born of every creature and the image of the invisible God.”

In like manner do the holy Scriptures speak of the third person, the Holy Ghost, “the Spirit of God.” As already mentioned, “He proceedeth from the Father and the Son;” that is, He has the same essence as the Father and the Son, so that the divinity and all the attributes of wisdom and power, belong equally to the Holy Ghost. How this can be, I cannot explain to you; it is a mystery beyond the comprehension of angels and every creature. We must be satisfied with what the Scriptures reveal unto us in this matter, and this revelation we must accept in faith, if we wish to be saved. The full understanding of this mystery pertains not to this life, but will take place in heaven. In the meanwhile we must be patient, and accept in child-like faith what the Word of God teaches concerning this article.

This doctrine is presented also in an exceedingly appropriate manner in the Creed, which, as every one knows, was not invented by us, nor by the fathers, but was compiled neatly and briefly from the writings of the prophets and the apostles, even as a bee gathers the honey from many flowers. In the creed we confess in the first place: “I believe in God the Father.” He is the first person in the Godhead. That the three persons may be more readily regarded as distinct from each other, there is asserted of each one, in precise words, a peculiar attribute and work. Thus, the work of

creation is ascribed to the first person, although this work indeed is done by the one divine being, so that it might properly be said: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost has created heaven and earth. But inasmuch as the Father, being the first person in the Godhead, has not manifested Himself in His majesty to His creatures in any other visible, external work besides creation, this work is ascribed to Him. The term “Father,” moreover, implies that He is distinct from the other persons in this, that He is of Him self and of no other. The Son and the Holy Ghost, however, proceed from the Father.

Again we confess in the creed: I believe in another who is also God; for believing refers not to any creature as its object, but only to God. And who is this other? “Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son.” Thus have the Christians confessed for more than fifteen hundred years; yea, it has been the belief of the faithful from the beginning of the world, even if they did not use the words of our creed to express their hope and trust. They believed and confessed the same faith that we confess in the creed.

The distinguishing feature is that He is called the only begotten Son of God. For all angels, yea, all Christians, may be called sons and children of God, but of not one of them can it be said that he is the “only begotten.” This attribute belongs only to Christ the Lord, who has no equal in His birth among all creatures, not even among the angels. He alone is the true, real Son of God the Father, because He is of the same divine, eternal, uncreated essence of the Father.

Then comes the mention of His special works: “Conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead and buried, Descended into hell, The third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father, From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.” Here the Son is represented as distinguished by His work. He, not the Father nor the Holy Ghost, became a real human being of flesh and blood, just as we are, and suffered and died for us, and rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, etc.

In the third article we confess: “I believe in the Holy Ghost.” Here another distinct person is mentioned, yet of equal divinity with the Father and the Son, since it is not permitted to believe in anyone else except the

one true God, as the first commandment declares: I alone am thy God. Here again is expressed precisely and clearly the truth, that the divine essence is one, that we believe in and adore one God in three distinct persons. In holy baptism we have the same distinction made, when we are baptized in the name of the one God, although Christ commands to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

The peculiarity of this third person is, that. He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and is therefore called “the Spirit” both of the Father and of the Son, being poured out into the hearts of men. He manifests His power in the Church of Christ by calling and enlightening among all nations the people, and kindling in their hearts the true faith through the Gospel, thus sanctifying them unto eternal life.

Thus we see that the creed speaks of three distinct persons in the one divine essence, each one having manifested Himself in a separate work. No doubt, our confession distinguishes so plainly between these persons, that we Christians might know that there is but one God in three persons. For this reason the different work of each of these persons is mentioned, that they themselves may not become confounded in our thoughts. To the Father is ascribed the work of creation, to the Son the work of redemption, and to the Holy Ghost the work of sanctification. This statement, however, does not mean that the Father alone is the Creator, nor that the Son alone is the Redeemer, nor that the Holy Ghost alone is the Sanctifier; for these works are performed by the divine Majesty in its unity, the creation as well as the redemption and the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection from the dead and life eternal. But our creed designates especially the Father as the Creator, the work of creation pertaining originally to Him as the first person in the Godhead. So the Son is especially mentioned in connection with the work of redemption, which He in His own person performed; and in the same manner the Holy Ghost is particularly mentioned in the work of sanctification, for which He was sent and made manifest. The intention of this statement of the doctrine of the Trinity in our creed was, that the Christians should have the humble but certain faith that there is but one God, existing however as three persons in one divine essence, a doctrine obtained by the fathers of the Church from the writings of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, and defended successfully against all heretics.

This faith has come down to us, and God by His power has maintained it, over against all schismatics and the devil, in His church to this very day. Hence it behooves us humbly to cling to this faith without any further speculation, for Christians do not refuse to believe what may seem foolish to their human reason. St. Paul says: "We are made a spectacle to the world, we are fools for Christ's sake." Our reason can never understand, nor believe, that three are one and that one is in three, nor that God has become man. It can not comprehend that when a man according to the command of Christ is washed by water in baptism, he is bathed in the blood of Jesus and cleansed from all sin, etc. Such articles of faith appear to reason as foolishness, as St. Paul declares, when he calls the preaching of the Gospel foolishness, through which however God will save those who do not doubt, but believe the Word. The others, who give room to their reason in these matters of faith, and despise the Word, will perish in their wisdom and be lost.

We have now presented sufficient proofs for the Holy Trinity from the Scriptures and the Creed. From these the believing Christian will be fully instructed in his confession of this truth. In addition to these proofs, we may refer here also to miracles which show forth the divinity of Christ and the Holy Ghost, and which are indeed not unimportant. For God directs such miracles to be performed for the purpose of strengthening the Christians in the true faith. If it had been simply the will of God to punish those people who taught false doctrine, He could easily have reserved such punishment for yonder world, as He often permits people to live on in their sinful ways for ten, twenty, or thirty years unpunished. But in the case of some of these chief heretics, who have reviled and offended God with their doctrine, we recognize a peculiar, divine visitation in the punishment that came upon them here in this world, that thereby a clear testimony might be given, in the sight of men, of the wrath of God upon such heretics, who have been the cause of so much unbelief, blasphemy, and defamation of Himself and His holy Word.

The story is told that a certain heretic, by the name of Cerinthus, lived during the time of John the Evangelist, and that he was the first one who preached against the doctrine of the apostles, blaspheming Christ by teaching that He was not God. This heresy spread so rapidly that, after the other Evangelists, St. John had to write his Gospel for the very purpose of

defending and establishing the doctrine of the divinity of Christ against the false teachings of this Cerinthus and his crowd. Hence it is that St. John does not dwell so much upon the miracles of Christ as upon His person and His sermons, in which Christ speaks so powerfully of Himself as true God, born of the Father from eternity, equal to Him in majesty, power, honor, wisdom, justice, and all other divine attributes.

It so happened once, that John with a few of his disciples went into a public bath. When he saw that the heretic Cerinthus with his crowd was there too, he made haste to leave the bath, and told his disciples to hurry away with him and not to linger in company of blasphemers. His disciples obeyed and speedily followed him. Scarcely had they left the bath when the building fell with a crash, killing Cerinthus and all his followers.

A similar story is related concerning the heretic Arius, who especially attacked this article which teaches that Christ is true God. He did much harm with his false doctrine throughout Christendom, and it took four hundred years after his death to combat its injurious influence, yea, it is not even yet fully eradicated. In the death of this man the Lord God exalted His honor in a marvelous manner.

The narratives of those days tell us, how cunningly this Arius had ingratiated himself with the emperor Constantine and his advisers, by an oath leading them firmly to believe that he taught nothing wrong. The emperor even ordered the bishop Alexander of Constantinople to consider this Arius again as a member of the Christian Church, and to restore him to his priestly office. The pious bishop, however, refused to do this, for he knew full well what Arius and his crowd were aiming at. Hereupon Eusebius and other bishops, who took the part of Arius, threatened the faithful Alexander that if he would not comply with the emperor's order, they would drive him by force from his office, and have Arius restored by the vote of the congregation. They gave to Alexander one day to consider this matter before they would act. The pious bishop became much troubled at heart, for he knew that the following of Arius was large and powerful, and that he furthermore had for him the edict of the emperor and the entire imperial court. In this danger and distress Alexander went for help to that source where, in matters pertaining to the honor of God, help alone can be found, namely, to God Himself. All night long he continued in prayer, stretched upon the floor of the church, beseeching God to rescue the honor

of His name, and to employ such means as would effectually prevent the execution of the evil intentions of the heretics.

The next morning, when the time for assembling in the church had come, and when bishop Alexander would either have to receive Arius again into the Church or be driven from his office, Arius himself started early on his way to the sanctuary, walking proudly amid the large company of his friends. All at once, while yet on the road, he was seized with great pain in his bowels, and had to seek a private closet. The procession waited a long while on the street for the return of Arius, but he came not. Finally the report spread that he died in the closet, his lungs and liver having passed from him. The account of this terrible event very aptly concludes in these words: *mortem dignam blasphema et foetida mente*, that is, his death was worthy of his blasphemous and putrid heart.

Thus we see how this article of our faith has been proven and established from the Scriptures, has been defended by the apostles and the fathers of the Church, and, finally, has been corroborated by miraculous occurrences in spite of the devil and his imps. Nor should we doubt in the least the continuance of this doctrine, but must faith fully confess daily with our children in our creed, that we believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, one God in three persons.

Three different works are therefore mentioned in the creed, in order that the Christians should neither confound the persons, nor separate the divine nature in God, but would regard Him as one God in an inseparable essence. This doctrine is preached upon this Sunday to the end that people may again learn and know how the Church came by this faith, not through a dream, but through the grace of God, by His holy Word and the declarations of the Apostles and the fathers.

God grant that we may all remain firm in this doctrine and faith unto the end of our life. Amen.

Second Sermon For Trinity Sunday. Gospel Lesson: John 3:1—15.

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That Which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto Him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

This is a very beautiful Gospel Lesson from which we learn what is the right, only and certain way to eternal life. It seems, however, that it was selected for the festival of the Holy Trinity, because it presents, in such a beautiful and appropriate manner, the distinction of the three persons in the highest and greatest work which God performs with us poor human beings, in that He justifies and saves us. For here it is clearly said of the Father that He loved the world and gave it His only begotten Son. Here we have two different persons, Father and Son. “The Father loves the world, and gives to it His Son.” The “Son” permits Himself to be given to the world, and, as Christ here says, “permits Himself, like the serpent in the wilderness, to be lifted up on the cross, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” To such work the third person, the Holy Ghost, afterwards comes, who, through the water of holy Baptism, enkindles faith in the heart, and thus regenerates us for the kingdom of God; as the Lord here also plainly speaks of the person of the Holy Ghost: “Except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit,” etc.

This is a very comforting sermon, which should always make our hearts joyful toward God; inasmuch as we see that all three persons, the whole Godhead, confer and see to it that poor, miserable human beings are helped against sin, death and the devil, unto righteousness, eternal life and the kingdom of God. How then can we be afraid of God on account of our sins? How can we have an evil heart toward Him? For if He had desired to condemn us on account of our sins, as we always fear He will, especially when the hour of death approaches, the Father would not have given His only begotten Son, and the Father and Son would not have invited us to the washing of regeneration and called us under the wings of the Holy Ghost. Thus this article concerning the holy Trinity is here presented in the most beautiful and affectionate manner. But enough has been said concerning this matter in the last sermon; we will therefore take up this Gospel Lesson part by part, in which we hear how the Lord held with Nicodemus, the scribe, a long conversation, which the good old man was utterly unable to understand. Hence we must first examine as to what it was that hindered him from grasping the Lord’s words and meaning.

It is a good indication that he followed the Lord; but because he did not dare to do so publicly, he came to Him by night. His words also show that he did not despise the Lord Jesus, but esteemed Him very highly as a

wonderful Preacher whom God sent into the world, and who had attested His doctrine with glorious miracles. His words did not proceed out of an evil heart, as did those of the Pharisees, Matt. 22: “Master, we know that Thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth.” No; Nicodemus spoke from his heart when he said that our blessed Lord is a specially precious teacher, because God confirmed His doctrine with so many eminent miracles.

Christ the Lord was well pleased with such thoughts. Therefore as Nicodemus praises Him as the most exalted teacher, so He wants to preach to him now the sublimest sermon concerning the sublimest and greatest work that can be preached about; namely, as to how one can see the kingdom of God, that is, how one can be freed from sin, come to the grace of God and obtain everlasting life. For this is the sermon which the Son of God alone brought from heaven to us human beings on earth; as John says, the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared it.

It is indeed true that all the world has in all ages troubled itself about the salvation of the soul, and devised and employed various ways and means for this purpose. For Nicodemus himself came with the thought that he, thank God, also knew, without Christ, how he should and could be saved. He thought that, because he was a Jew and had the law, he had the advantage of knowing what to do, if he wished to lead a life pleasing unto God and to manifest the best obedience. With this he was satisfied, and did not think that he was entirely mistaken, as he soon heard from Christ. We see the same also in our Papists. If a monk could succeed in doing enough for his order, he could imagine he were already sitting in God’s bosom, like the Pharisee, Luke 18, who gloried in his fasting, giving of tithes, and other good works.

In short, all men’s hearts are of the same nature. Just as they fear and tremble when they feel their sins, so they hope and trust that all is well between them and God, if they are outwardly pious and have committed no evil deed which can frighten and intimidate their conscience. Therefore one takes this plan, another that, as each may deem best, by means of which he trusts to be justified before God. The Jew has his Moses; a monk, his order. And indeed we all imagine that we would be safe, if we would diligently keep the Ten Commandments. So also thought Nicodemus. But as he

regarded Christ as an especially great teacher, Christ wanted to prove Himself to be such a teacher, and give him, in the first place, the following information: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Here the matter is stated in clear and precise words. Christ thus presents Himself as a more than ordinary teacher, the like of whom Nicodemus never heard; therefore, too, he did not understand what was said. This much only he understood, that he was not yet born again. But as to how he could be born again he was in total ignorance.

Now do thou also meditate as to what the Lord means by this statement. For if one cannot see the kingdom of God unless one has been born again, it follows of course that we, as we are born of our parents into this world, must be damned inevitably, together with reason, free will, the Law and all good acts, which both reason and the will can undertake. But what a lamentable thing it is that the people are taught nothing concerning this new birth, but are merely pointed, as is done by the pope, to their own works, in order that they may be saved through them. How does such a doctrine harmonize with what Christ here teaches? They say that good works save. Christ says: If then are not born again thou canst not be saved.

But now it is true and undeniable that a person can, by his own strength, as is seen in the case of the heathen, accustom himself to discipline, virtue, and honorable conduct. Thus we see that not all men are murderers, adulterers, fornicators, thieves, winebibbers, idlers, but many are good and honorable before the world. These are precious and beautiful virtues and good works, to which we should admonish every one; for God demands it in the Ten Commandments. But here it is determined, let the virtues and works be what they may, if there is no new birth, they all belong to the devil in the abyss of hell. Into heaven and the kingdom of God they cannot come. Christ Himself says this, and no one should doubt it.

Here reason is caught, which immediately institutes a comparison and concludes thus: Theft, murder, adultery are displeasing to God, and He punishes them; hence it must follow that to avoid such sins is pleasing unto God, and will be rewarded by Him; otherwise, reason says, God would be unjust. Now it is true, to avoid these and other sins and to do good, is pleasing unto God; and He will also not fail to reward it. But to see the

kingdom of God, something other and greater is required; namely, as is here stated, that one be born again. Therefore God was not angry at the Pharisee, Luke 18, because he was no robber, adulterer nor unjust, as other men, and because he fasted and gave tithes; this would have been satisfactory to God, if the shameful vice had not clung to it, that the man thought he would enter heaven thereby and imagined himself to be much better than the publican.

Therefore it is here decreed: Reason is something noble and precious; the will to do what is good is also something noble and precious; the law and the Ten Commandments, a fine, honorable and blameless deportment, are all excellent and good gifts, for which we should thank God; but when we speak of the kingdom of God and how we can enter it, then reason, will, law and all good works are of no avail; here nothing will suffice, save that we be born again. Otherwise we cannot see the kingdom of God, but must inevitably be lost, together with reason, free will, law and the Ten Commandments.

Well then, sayest thou, I will do no good at all. But neither will that do; for in that way the judgment of God against thee will but be more severe. Therefore do both, use diligence to keep the Ten Commandments and besides confess with unfeigned sincerity that thou art a poor sinner, who must needs, on account of his sins, be forever condemned. Then listen to what Christ further says, how He likewise administers comfort, after He has so plainly, as regards our natural birth, denied us salvation.

Nicodemus felt the severe sentence very well, and therefore reflected on what this new birth is, and observed that he could not be born again of his parents; therefore he asked, How can this thing be? For it is impossible that I should enter the second time into my mother's womb and be born again. In this way he induces Christ to teach how the new birth must take place. He says: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Here, for the second time, He pronounces sentence against the first birth, declaring that it is of the flesh and sinful, and does not belong to the kingdom of God. As if He would say: Thou askest if then must be otherwise born of thy mother. If thou shouldst be born otherwise a thousand times of thy mother, thou wouldst still be and remain the same Nicodemus. Of the

flesh nothing but flesh can be born. Therefore for this new birth, not father and mother, who are both flesh and full of sin, but water and the Spirit are necessary. Whoever is thus born again is a new man and will enter the kingdom of God.

No doubt Nicodemus considered this a very ridiculous affair, so that he thought within himself: Are my reason, will, and the law of Moses not able to do what water can? What can be the meaning of this? Thus the good man becomes so confused that he does not know what to say, and must freely confess that he does not understand a word of what the Savior said, although he understands Moses and the Ten Commandments, and therefore thinks himself a very learned Doctor.

Let us now diligently examine the words and properly sum up the matter. It is decreed that we are to do good works and to exercise obedience to the law; but by this we do not see the kingdom of God. If we are to see this we must become altogether other and new men. This does not take place through bodily birth, but through water and the Spirit; these are the true father and mother of this new-born offspring.

The water is nothing else than holy Baptism. For thus saith Christ, Mark 16:16: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." But water has not this power naturally. For water is water; that is, it is an element and a creature, which can not of itself move nor change the heart or wash away sin. Clothes and the filth of the skin thou canst cleanse and purify with water; but the soul cannot be moved nor cleansed with water. This water, however, of which the Lord here speaks, and which we call Baptism, is not simply water only, but it is water in which God's Word, command and promise are contained. Here two things come together, water and the Word, and are so connected with one another that we cannot separate the one from the other. If you put away the Word from the water you have no Baptism; if you put away the water from the Word you again have no Baptism. But if the Word and water remain together, you have a water in which the Holy Ghost is present and through which He desires to regenerate you unto the kingdom of God, that is, to forgive your sins and to save you.

Therefore we should diligently consider this passage, especially against the blind rabble of the Anabaptists, who regard infant Baptism as inappropriate and unfruitful. But how can this Baptism be unfruitful, since

you are here told that Christ has set apart water in order that it may bring about regeneration through the cooperation of the Holy Spirit? Now if children are in need of being born again and otherwise cannot see the kingdom of God, why should anyone deny them Baptism, or claim that such water, comprehended in God's command and connected with God's Word, cannot serve to regenerate them? Is it not true that the words of Christ directly insist upon it that whoever is to be born again must be so born of water? Hence, although water without the Spirit can do nothing, the Holy Ghost nevertheless does not desire to carry on His work without water.

Therefore it is an abominable and terrible error that in several places some preachers were so bold as to baptize children without water; for if Baptism is to be administered rightly we must have not only the Word, not only the Spirit, but also water. For so Christ here orders it, and such order no one dare break.

We see such baptizing with water, but the regeneration which the Holy Ghost brings about in the heart through such Baptism, we do not see. But in order that we may not, owing to such mysterious, invisible operation of the Holy Spirit, despise the simple outward baptizing with water, the Lord further says to Nicodemus: "Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

The words are very simple, just as the work is also plain and simple. For in the estimation of reason there is nothing particularly imposing in this that we bring a child or an adult and confess that, on account of sin, such a person is in the bonds of the devil and unable to rescue himself therefrom; and yet in such great distress we are to do nothing more than to apply water to such person either by pouring or by immersion in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. But, says Christ, let no one despise this work because of its insignificant appearance. For the Holy Ghost carries on His work secretly; this requires faith, which grasps the words, and does not doubt that the matter is just as the words declare. For with your eyes, yea, with all your senses, you will never be able to see, understand, or comprehend it. Just as is the case with the wind; you hear the sound thereof; but it is impossible for you so to comprehend it that you

could say: Here it begins, there it ends. Just so it is here: you see the outward work with the water, and hear the sound of the word, that it is done in the name of Jesus for the washing away of sin. Whoever will not hold to the Word and desires to grasp or seek the Spirit and His operation in some other way, will fail. For if he is to be born of the Spirit, nothing more is required than that he permit himself to be baptized with water and listen to “the sound,” that is, to the Word, and accept the same by faith; then he will be born again unto the kingdom of God, otherwise not at all. Where then are the blasphemous sects and fanatics who can do nothing but prate and boast about the Spirit? But it is the evil spirit, the devil himself, who has taken possession of them bodily, because they have rejected as things unnecessary and useless to salvation — Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the Word, which Christ Himself has secured for us at a great price. May God rebuke the blasphemous spirit! Christ, however, does not so teach here, but directs us to holy Baptism and “the sound,” that is, the Word; and warns us that if we are not satisfied with water and “the sound,” we shall retain nothing of the Holy Spirit and never more come to the new birth. Therefore let us regard our Baptism and the Word as our greatest treasure, since we know of a certainty that if we continue in them we are born again unto the kingdom of God.

This then is the doctrine as to how we can be born again, that is, come into the kingdom of God. It is a new and unheard of doctrine on earth; but it alone is certain and right and never deceives us; while all other doctrines are false and deceptive, no matter how beautiful they may seem to the world. Both the life of the Pharisees among the Jews and the monastic orders and the priestly estate under popery, made an imposing appearance; and it is a peculiarly excellent trait when a man leads a decent and honorable life according to the Ten Commandments; but thereby we cannot be regenerated. The water and the Spirit alone must do it, who nevertheless will not permit Himself to be seen or noticed in any other way than the wind through its sound. Whoever accepts “the sound,” that is, believes and is baptized, is born again and will be saved.

But Nicodemus is so deeply wrapped up in his thoughts about the law and good works that he can not grasp nor understand this doctrine. As we also see in the case of those Papists who mean well and are not willfully bad; they always find this obstacle in the way, that they think: What! Are

our works nothing? Is it not pleasing unto God that we pray and fast so much, serve Him day and night, and lead such an austere life? Therefore Christ speaks somewhat more severely to him, as He does not believe Him and is not willing to be instructed, and says: “Art thou a master of Israel and knowest not these things?”

As if He would say: Thou art a master of the people of God, whom thou art to teach and to show the way of salvation. Alas for thy teaching and showing of the way to salvation, since thou hast not yet advanced so far as to be able to know thy own nature and being, and art of the opinion that thou canst get to heaven, although then be not born again. Christ therefore wants Nicodemus and all teachers who can preach of nothing more than the law and good works to be rejected as false and misleading preachers; not because it is wrong to teach good works and to admonish the people to do them; for God Himself does this through the law, and therefore it is right and well; but because it is wrong for the teachers of the law to direct them to this doctrine and to leave them under the impression that they need nothing more in order to obtain eternal life. For here it is stated in plain Words, that even if the law and good Works are done to the best of our ability, they still cannot help us into the kingdom of God: “Except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit.”

Now it is the Spirit who, through water and the Word, makes new men and new hearts. The law and works do not in the least change men and hearts. Therefore whoever would rightly direct men to the kingdom of God, let him look at this passage and not begin with works and the law, but point them to Baptism and the Spirit, that is, to the Word, through which the Holy Ghost breathes upon hearts and regenerates them. For as we do not have nor know more about the wind than its sound, so we have no more of the Holy Ghost than the Word; to this we can hold fast and so expect the Holy Ghost and its operation. Now what such Word is, and how this Holy Spirit “sounds,” the Lord further teaches and says: “No man hath ascended up into heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.”

Here the doctrine commences concerning which the Lord says: “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?” For this doctrine has never entered into the heart of any man, but the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the

Father, hath declared it unto us." This doctrine contains two parts. The first is very severe; for it is summarily decreed: " No man hath ascended up to heaven, but the Son of man who came down from heaven."

This amounts to the same as is said above: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." That is, no man can obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness nor salvation and eternal life through the law, good works, reason or free will; yea, even if he has the law, good works, reason and free will in the best form in which they can be had, it helps him not; he is a sinner and condemned, and will not get to heaven. This is certainly a plain and clear passage that ought to make the Jews and the Papists lose all confidence in their own works and piety. For, tell me, what man came down from heaven? Not one; not even Adam and Eve. No one else came down but the Son of God and of Mary, as John here says. If then no one shall ascend up to heaven but He that came down from heaven, then the matter is absolutely settled, and no man will ever be able to change it. All men as they are born into this world of their father and mother, must remain here below and will not get into heaven; but if they do not get to heaven where will they abide? On earth they have no certain and enduring dwelling place; for they die. But in case they do not get to heaven they must remain in death. This is the judgment which Christ renders respecting the whole world, no one excepted; whether it be Adam, Eve, Abraham, Moses, or David, they must all remain here below and cannot of themselves get to heaven; for only He ascends into heaven who came down from heaven. What then becomes of good works, merit, law and free will? They all deserve to go to hell; they do not help us into heaven, that is certain.

Ay, sayest thou, are all men then to be damned and lost? Yes, as far as it depends upon themselves it is impossible that it should be otherwise; let them do and omit whatever they can or please, they will still not make a way or an entrance into heaven. There is, however, a way which not we but the Son of God makes. Of this Christ now proceeds to speak when He says: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

This is the second part of this heavenly discourse in respect to the "sound" of the Holy Ghost, and is as comforting as the first part is terrible. For it is a terrible judgment that no one shall ascend to heaven and be

saved. But this terrible judgment is used by the Lord to show that our natural birth is sinful, and that there is nothing in us that is worthy of eternal life, in order that we may not only not become secure and vain-glorious, but reflect, humble ourselves before God and desire grace. Here then the right comfort begins; that, just as thou heardest before, no man can get to heaven, so also hear that all who believe in Christ shall not perish, but have eternal life. This then is the pleasant “sound” by which the Holy Ghost can be perceived, and grasped.

For both these doctrines must be taught in Christendom. The first is in regard to sin and our depraved nature and condition, so that we must despair of ever getting to heaven by means of our works, life, doing and omitting. When the hearts have been rightly struck and terrified by this doctrine, then the comfort must also follow forthwith that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came down to the earth from heaven, took unto Himself our flesh and blood, and suffered death for our sins, in order that through Him we might be freed from sin and be made heirs of eternal life. Whoever accepts such doctrine, believes it, and finds comfort in it, is made whole, so that Christ will not leave him here on earth and in death, but will take him with Him to heaven.

This is the doctrine concerning heavenly things which to this day the people, and especially the Nicodemuses, find great difficulty in understanding; that is, such as come with the thought that if we have the law we need nothing more in order to be saved. These are they who do not know, in the first place, that although the law is right and good it still cannot on that account help us, because we are wicked by nature, and on account of such inborn and inherited wickedness we cannot satisfy the law, although we apparently do the outward works. In the second place, they know still less that we must enter into heaven through this Man, the Son of Mary, who alone came down from heaven. Here again untold evil ensues, in that they not only rely upon their own works and righteousness, but despise and persecute the righteousness which comes through faith in Christ, as we see in the case of the Papists, who can endure anything better and oppose nothing more severely than our teaching that we must be saved alone through faith in Christ, and cannot be saved through good works. This did not originate with us; we repeat it after Christ our Lord, who is the truth; whoever will not believe Him, let him forbear.

In the 21st chapter of Numbers we are told that the people of Israel were angry in the wilderness, murmured against God and Moses, and especially treated with contempt the glorious blessing which God bestowed upon them in giving them manna in the wilderness. This sin God punished by sending among them fiery serpents that bit them. The result was that their bodies became inflamed and burned like fire of hell, so that they sank down and died in great numbers. Then the people recognized their sin, confessed that they had done wrong, went to Moses and besought him to entreat the Lord to remove the plague from them. Thereupon the Lord commanded Moses to make a brazen serpent and to lift it up in the wilderness. Whoever would look up at this brazen serpent should recover and not die.

This history the Lord cites here and applies it to Himself, that He too must needs be lifted up like the serpent. Whoever then will look up at Him, that is, as He Himself explains, believe in Him. shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Let us here, first of all, learn the cause of the dreadful judgment that the Lord twice passes upon all men, in that He says: "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but the Son of man that came down from heaven." Again: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Whence has this evil come upon man, on account of which he must remain out of heaven and be forever lost? From nothing else than this that the old serpent, the devil, so bit our first parent, and through sin so poisoned him, that death has us by the throat; and it is impossible for us to doctor and help ourselves. This we see in the case of the Jews: whoever was bitten was a prey to death, and nothing could help him. So it is with us all. For the wages of sin is death; and where sin is, death must follow. Now because all men by their natural birth are born of their father and mother as sinners, they must also bear the sentence and on account of it suffer death, as the Lord expressly threatens Adam and Eve: "In the day ye eat thereof ye shall surely die."

But the Lord lets His mercy shine forth in this that He does not want such poor, poisoned and condemned persons to be lost; and just as He commanded a brazen serpent to be lifted up, which looked like the other serpents, except that it was not poisonous, and was to be a remedy against poison, so He permitted His Son to be lifted up upon the cross, that all who look upon Him shall not be lost, but be saved from death and have everlasting life. He also has the form of the poisonous serpents upon the

cross; yet there is no poison, but merely the appearance of it. For although Christ has taken on Himself our flesh and blood, still His flesh and blood are without poison and sin; yes, they serve to save us from poison and sins.

This is the right “sound of the Holy Ghost,” through which He produces the new birth in the heart, so that one may believe and look upon such brazen serpent with sure confidence, and recover. But it can scarcely have been otherwise than that some of the Jews despised the brazen serpent and said: My dear Sir, do you think this looking is going to help you? I would have confidence, if there were this and the other medicine, but what virtue can there be in the brazen serpent? Or, if there were any virtue in it, such virtue would be operative rather if one would take hold of the serpent and press it upon the bite, than that a mere looking upon it should be effective and help.

Such is the case to this day with respect to the true brazen serpent, the Lord Jesus Christ. All men are of the opinion that if they are to be helped, it must not be done by “looking” or faith. Whoever does good works and commits no sin, has all the more advantage before God. Therefore no matter what one may preach, it is of no avail. One resorts to this, another to that; “for all men have not faith.” They thus want to find another way to health than by “looking,” that is, faith in Christ. But learn this: It is decided, that the devil has so poisoned you through sin, that death has you by the throat, and you cannot escape, but must absolutely submit. But if you are to be saved from this poison and death, by all means don’t think of any other medicine than this “looking”; namely, that you rightly look upon Christ on the cross as the One who died for you, offered up His life, atoned for your sins with His death, and thus has reconciled you to God. If you believe this and are baptized, then you are truly born again through the Holy Ghost unto the kingdom of God; and do not doubt it in the least. For you have heard above that this new birth takes place in no other way than through the “sound,” that is, the Word. Cling to this and believe what it tells you, that it is yea and Amen.

Thus, my dear hearers, you have the doctrine of today’s Gospel lesson in the simplest form. In the first place, we human beings are by nature sinners and are worthy of eternal death. But we shall be redeemed from everlasting death if we look upon the man Christ Jesus upon the cross as the One who

has paid our debt, overcome death, reconciled us unto God, and brought us into eternal life.

This doctrine it is that makes different men and entirely new hearts, so that we can say in sins, in death, and in other temptations: Well, I can not deny it, the old serpent, the devil, has badly bitten and horribly poisoned me; but over against this it, comforts me to know that, although my Lord Jesus Christ, on account of His humanity, also appears as if He were full of poison like any other serpent, He still not only has no poison in Him, but hangs upon the cross in order to purify me from such poison and help me against sin, death and the devil. Therefore let the devil do what he pleases, rend me and do me all manner of evil, I will hold to my Lord Jesus and comfort myself with this, that He was lifted up that all that believe in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life.

Where this comfort is thus in the heart against this eternal poison, there henceforth will follow a fine, amiable life toward others; so that, as we expect help from Christ the Lord against the eternal evil, we will also willingly help others whenever we can. For such a person looks far about him; and although others wrong him, he still is not moved to anger, but pities them. For he sees that this does not come from anything else than the poison which all have received from the bite of the devil; he therefore seeks for means by which he can induce others to come to this medicine and be saved from the noisome venom. Thus this doctrine is the fountain and spring whence all virtue, all comfort, all joy and safety flow.

May God, the Almighty, Merciful Father, for the sake of His dear Son Jesus Christ, keep us in this doctrine and cause us to grow from day to day, that we may by no means lose sight of Jesus, and may thus through true faith in Him be freed from everlasting death. Amen.

Sermon For The First Sunday After Trinity. Luke 16:19—31.

There was a certain rich man which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Sen, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, they have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

This is a precious Gospel lesson, the like of which one does not find anywhere else in the Scriptures, in respect to the judgment which will be passed upon men after this life. It is not necessary to dispute here as to

whether this is a history or a parable. For as Christ names the two persons, and tells us what the life of each was and what judgment was passed upon them after death — how the rich man was tormented in the flames and poor Lazarus was in bliss — we are justified in believing that what is said really occurred. We must further also believe that the same judgment will be passed upon all, according as they live like the rich man or like poor Lazarus.

For these two examples of the rich man and Lazarus the Lord places before the whole world. The first is that of the rich man, who for a short time lived here on earth in joy and happiness, but in the other world is lost and eternally sad; and the second one, that of Lazarus, who for a certain length of time here on earth was poor and miserable, but in the other world is rich and happy. These are set before us in order that each one may learn to act according to these examples; for in respect to both we must receive a certain instruction and must conduct ourselves correctly, or eternal life is lost.

Therefore whoever here on earth is poor and miserable, like Lazarus, let him learn not to be offended at such misery, and not to seek his comfort in this temporal life, but to hope in that which is future and eternal.

For no Christian is to think that when he fares ill God has forgotten him or is angry with him. For this is God's way and manner, that like a good father He is always after His children with the rod, in order that through such correction they may be admonished and kept from sin; since they would otherwise, if there were no correction, feel secure and continue in sin. Therefore a Christian is not only not to be offended at his misery, but to derive the assurance therefrom that God loves him, thinks of him and seeks what is best for him. As also the wise man says: "If a father really loves his son, he corrects him."

Hence it is a great mistake if you judge of God's goodness and grace by your temporal condition. It is true, indeed, money and goods, a healthy body, and the like, are gifts and blessings of God, but such a blessing as shall not endure forever. For at last everything must be left behind at any rate. Besides, to this blessing the evil attaches itself, that if one does not especially abide in the fear of God and pay strict attention to the Word, it gives rise to much sin on account of our sinful nature.

Therefore we see that upon the rich God lays various crosses and trials, diseases and afflictions; not only because they have deserved such things by their sins, but because God desires to guard them against future sins, and thus keep them in His fear. They would otherwise, were it not for trials, decrease in prayer, faith and zeal for the Word of God, from day to day, and finally neglect them altogether.

The true, highest and best blessing; however, by which we can and should discern the goodness of God, is not temporal prosperity, but the everlasting blessing, that God has called us to His Gospel, in which we hear Him and learn how He, on account of His Son, desires to be merciful to us, to forgive our sins and to save us eternally; besides to defend us graciously here on earth from the tyranny of the devil and of the world. Whoever rightly considers this blessing, even if he have lack of temporal blessings, so that he is poor, sick, despised, miserable and burdened with all manner of adversity, still regards all these things as insignificant; for he sees that he always gains more than he has lost. If he has no money nor property, he still knows that he is called unto everlasting life and that this is assured unto him in Baptism and the Word.

So also with respect to other trials and difficulties. Let him fare as God please, his heart still always has the comfort that it is a matter of only a short time when it will become better; and better in such a way that no one will be able to take his joy from him; for he has through Christ a merciful God, who is his Father, and wants to grant him through Christ the eternal inheritance. In this way poor Lazarus also comforted himself. His body suffered from the pain, so that he often wept and cried out on account of it. So, too, no doubt, his heart often was saddened and burdened on account of the fact that, in addition to his sickness, he was forsaken and was not served with food and drink, although the rich godless man lived in affluence. This, I say, pained him; for it is not possible that the heart of a man should not be troubled by it. But against this he finally kept this comfort in his heart, saying: I see that my heavenly Father wants it so, therefore in His service I will gladly bear it all, knowing as I do that it cannot last forever. It is but a short time until sickness and all evil must cease, and the blessed change occur when joy and comfort shall take the place of temporal suffering. For I have the promise that God, for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, will be gracious unto me, forgive my sins, remove me from the curse and receive

me into favor. Therefore let come what may. If the people pay no attention to me and grant me not the crumbs which they give to the dogs, I comfort myself with this that God is concerned about me and will not let me want forever; therefore I can suffer and be distressed for a while, and wait for something better.

But that Lazarus had such thoughts, and comforted himself thus in his sufferings, is shown in the first place by his name. For “Lazarus” is the Hebrew name Eleasar, and means God help; that he placed his confidence upon God’s everlasting help, not upon men. Thus, too, the Evangelist also shows this when he says that “Lazarus was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom”; which is nothing else than this, that Lazarus confided in the “promise” which was made unto Abraham, that “in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed.” To this promise Lazarus clung, and with it he comforted himself. Although all the world regarded him as an accursed man because he was so poor and miserable, he still would enjoy the blessed seed, and remain, not under the curse of God, but in His everlasting grace. And this faith kept him, so that when he departed this life the angels carried him into Abraham’s bosom.

Now Christ, our dear Lord, wants us diligently to consider this example and to learn it well. For His Christians must consider that here on earth they must, like poor Lazarus, have want, and suffer all manner of misfortune. Now, whoever does not possess nor know the comfort which Lazarus had, cannot fail to become impatient and will at last despair. For flesh and reason do not deny their nature. If the Word of God is not used as a weapon of defense, a person soon begins to think, when evil befalls him, that God has forgotten him and does not want him, or else He would help him and not suffer him thus to be in distress. That we should look to the future and comfort ourselves with it, is of no avail. Hence many an untried person becomes impatient and thinks thus: If God does not want to help, then let the devil help and whoever can. This means falling away from God entirely, becoming God’s enemy, and not looking for anything good from Him, and besides the temporal suffering and distress heaping upon one’s self the eternal wrath of God and damnation. Of this we should by all means beware, and not forget poor Lazarus. He was indeed a poor, miserable man; but because he held firmly to the promise respecting Christ and the life to come, and was willingly obedient unto God, he received rich joy in view of

such suffering, and has instead of a little suffering an unspeakable and eternal joy and comfort. This is the example of poor Lazarus, by, which all Christians are to govern themselves, and thus also to comfort themselves in their sorrow.

The other example is that of the rich man, who here on earth fared well and according to his wish and will; but in the other world he must forever want and be damned. Here again we must believe that our Lord Jesus Christ tells us the truth respecting such judgment and damnation, that the rich man is lying in the flames of hell and suffering horrible torment, which it is not possible to describe with words; and that this is also a great cause of his suffering that he sees poor Lazarus, whom he formerly so woefully despised, in everlasting happiness, and cannot enjoy at his hands so much as a drop of water, and must remain in such misery eternally, without any hope of help.

But what is the reason that the poor man came into such eternal woe and suffering? It is not this alone that he was rich and possessed much money, that he clothed himself and ate and drank; for these are God's gifts and order. If only we use moderation in these things and do not abuse them, God will willingly grant unto us money and goods, meat and drink, pleasure and splendid apparel, and other things according to each one's station. But the cause of the rich man's misery is this, that he had money and goods, wore costly clothing and lived in splendor, and did not think of the life to come, as to how it would go with him if today or tomorrow he were called away from this earth. His whole aim and attention were directed only to having enough and being at ease here on earth, just as if he needed nothing more, whereas Christ warns in the Gospel that our hearts should not be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life. This is a cause which helped him to everlasting damnation; for from this it follows that he did not take the Word of God to heart. He permitted nothing to disturb him, whether God promised or threatened, if only he had no lack of anything here on earth.

The other reason was that he saw poor Lazarus lying before him, but does not grant him as much in his distress as he would a dog; so that the Evangelist says that the dogs had more sympathy with the poor man and served him more than did the rich man. He did not reflect that God had given him more in order that he might help others who had need; but like a

swine that would devour every thing and leave others nothing, if it could help it, so this rich man also thought only of having enough for himself, and was not concerned about the wants of others who were poor. Such sins bring about the terrible judgment that he had his pleasure and desire here for awhile, but suffers eternally in the other world.

Such examples the Lord places before us that we may thereby learn, and beware of such sins and judgments; that we should not feel secure, as if there were no other life than this temporal one here on earth, and that we should not forget the poor. For whoever has received of God so that he can help the poor, and still does not do it, to him it will at the last day and in all eternity be the greatest pain and torment that he will see the poor, whom he despised and failed to help, living before him in joy, just as the rich man saw Lazarus. On the other hand, whoever has served, helped and done good to many, will in the life to come find joy in the same. But is it not a calamity above every calamity, that this rich man merely asks for a drop of cold water, but he cannot receive it in all eternity?

Therefore let us by no means forget the poor, but gladly help them and give to them. And this not only with the customary alms, that we give anyone a penny, a nickel or a half-dollar, according to our ability and his wants; such help we every way owe the poor. But besides this there is another kind of alms according to which each one can help his neighbor in his station and calling, and that too every day and every hour; namely, that each one so manage his business, calling and trade so as not to take the advantage of anyone, not to defraud anyone with false wares, and so as to be satisfied with a reasonable profit, and to pay the people every penny that belongs to them; that one give correct weight and measure, and neither in buying nor selling seek such an advantage as will be to the disadvantage of others. For what unfaithfulness there is in all branches of trade is evident. But whoever deals uprightly, although he gives nothing away, and takes a reasonable profit, gives alms. On the other hand, those who dispose of their goods only to their own advantage, and seek only their own benefit, steal the money out of the purses of the people: as when a baker makes the loaves too small or adulterates the material, a butcher gives too light weight, a vintner sells the wine too high or adulterates it; but who can tell it all? No business is so small and insignificant but that if you manage it faithfully, giving to others true wares for the proper price, you will be

giving alms. On the other hand, if you take the advantage of the people or do not pay them rightly, you commit theft, and are a thief before God, and at the last day you will see before you the poor Lazarus to whom you denied such alms of your trade, and even stole and took through your avarice what belonged to him; as you hear in this place how the rich man fared. In this way every one could make his trade, whether it were great or small, a true charity with which God would be well pleased, and most assuredly not only temporal prosperity would result, but, as Christ says, we would also make unto ourselves friends with the mammon of unrighteousness, whose testimony we could possess and enjoy in life everlasting.

But the world is and remains world, and will not suffer itself to be admonished or helped. Who ever has much, wants to give nothing and constantly to obtain more. Whoever has little, meditates how he also can obtain something, no matter who suffers thereby. Therefore God must permit all manner of punishment to come upon the base world here, and afterwards must punish with hell fire. Now although the world in part experiences this and hears it in sermons, it still does not heed it, nor does it become better.

Is not this, however, a monstrous, fearful blindness and hardness of heart? In other things we can use caution. If it happens that a famine is expected, whoever is able lays up provisions for one, two or three years, in order that he may be prepared against want. Why do we not much rather do it here, since we know that everlasting want will follow, if we do not prepare ourselves properly?

But this condemnation is so much the more severe, in that if you once get into it you will never more in all eternity get out of it. For then all help is cut off. Abraham and Lazarus, as you are told here, not only do not want to help with a drop of water, but they also cannot help. How, then, do we poor mortals get into this sad condition, that we take so little account of such ever lasting peril and do not strive to know how we can be safe against it, seeing that elsewhere, in very unimportant things that do not amount to more than one or two florins, we can prepare and secure ourselves so well? Is it not true, that the devil takes from us our understanding and wit, or else we would pay more attention to such everlasting than to temporal loss? But everybody goes on, concerned only as to how he can have enough here,

leave a good deal to his children, and live in splendor. Whoever has this, thinks he has enough. Whoever has it not, thinks he cannot rest until he has obtained it. Thus the hearts are overcharged with cares of this life, so that their judgment comes upon them as a snare, and they are lying in death and damnation before they are aware of it.

Now this is the reason why the Lord places before us this example of the rich man and has it preached unto us; namely, because He would like to drive us into such anxiety that we might not be concerned only about temporal affairs, but much more about that which is eternal and fadeth not away, and that we might so manage that which is temporal and fadeth away, as not thereby to give cause for our everlasting destruction. For if this rich man had not had so much, and besides had suffered and been tried to some extent, he would not have gotten into such misery. But money and goods made him haughty, so that he thought he had no need either of God or of His Word, and hence he lived in luxury, and permitted nothing to try him. About eternal things he did not concern himself, and because he had enough of every thing, he also did not concern himself about the temporal, except in thinking as to how he could secure for himself good days and luxury, and spend his time in enjoyment. Against this Christ warns us and says: Take heed; if you intend, like the rich man, to seek only how you can live in splendor and joy in this world, it will end with you as it did with him; namely, that such short, perishable and likewise uncertain joy will be followed by everlasting misery and suffering.

These are the two examples which we ought by no means to forget as long as we live, in order that we may have a sure comfort in suffering and trials, and so deport ourselves in temporal things that we may not lose the everlasting riches.

To such doctrine that is conducive which Christ further says, how the rich man, when there was no hope of help for him, thought of his brethren, and besought Abraham that he would send Lazarus, in order that they might not follow the example of the rich man and also be damned. But Abraham utterly refused to comply and said: "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them." But when the rich man continued his importunities, and thought it would be more fruitful in their case if one went to them from the dead and would preach it unto them than when they heard it in the temple,

Abraham answered once again and said: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”

The rich man saw that if anyone is to escape such condemnation he must repent and conduct himself otherwise than he did; he also considers that it may happen unto others as unto him. For although they have the Word of God and sermons, they may still despise them and not grow better through them. Therefore he thought that there was no better way of admonishing his brethren than that such an esteemed preacher should come to them, with whom they were acquainted, and whom they knew to have died and to be now in the other world, and bring them certain information as to the condition of things in that other world. And it is true, we ourselves are prone to think that such a sermon would not be despised, as other sermons, preached by men, are heard and despised. But Abraham absolutely denies this and says: Whoever would escape such everlasting condemnation and be saved, must look for and expect no other warning than that contained in Moses and the prophets; that is the only way that he can escape everlasting damnation and enter into ever lasting life. But if anyone will not hear Moses and the prophets, it would be of no avail, if even one should rise from the dead; yea, although even an angel or God Himself should preach in a visible form; such a one would still not believe. This certainly is paying a high compliment to the ministerial office, and an admonition to the people faith fully to heed the preached Word; seeing that there is no other means by which they can secure themselves against this terrible sentence of everlasting condemnation.

But what do Moses and the prophets preach? Chiefly these two things: first, they point to the promised Seed of the woman that should bruise the serpent’s head, that is, take the devil’s power from him and avert the evil that he inflicted upon all of us in Paradise. Of this Seed of the woman, who is the Son of God and brings divine power and righteousness to us on earth, Moses and the prophets treat, admonishing us and declaring when He shall come forth, and that we must hear Him, hold to His Word, and believe His promises.

Whoever, then, thus hears Moses and the prophets will, in the first place, despair of his own life, works and strength, and find comfort in the Seed alone; for He alone is the blessed Seed, and brings the blessing to us who are accursed and damned on account of our sins. Thus faith in Christ is the

only and true way in which one can escape from sin and death, and obtain salvation. Such Savior and comfort the rich man did not accept; he considered himself upright, as he probably was outwardly upright before the world; for the Gospel does not charge him with being an adulterer, robber, etc. Therefore he no doubt thought: If I were not so upright, God would not give me so much success and prosperity.

For it is natural with every person to rush to the conclusion, when he fares ill: Indeed, God is angry with me, is unconcerned about me, I must be lost without counsel, help and comfort, etc. On the other hand, if he fares well, if there is an abundance of everything, and if all goes according to his wishes, he thinks that God is well pleased with him, otherwise He would not be so gracious toward him; although, as is said above, such temporal prosperity is a very small and simple thing. Hence it is also the case here on earth that the godless are more prosperous than the pious. But let there be ever so much money and property in your possession, take heed that you do not consider yourself good, but place your trust and comfort on what Moses and the prophets teach; or it will go with you as with this rich man, who heard Moses and the prophets, and yet did not find comfort in Christ the Lord.

The second thing that Moses and the prophets teach is this: That after we have found our righteousness in the promised Seed alone, we also obey God, and, in this earthly life, do and keep that which He has commanded us; and, on the other hand, avoid and forsake that which He has forbidden; for this is fearing God and having Him before our eyes. But whoever is unwilling to do this and does not want to follow the law of God, but his own will and desires, that is, live in sin, cannot boast of being a child of God or of having Him before his eyes. He must therefore stand in jeopardy every moment that God will come, seize him and judge him as He finds him.

Therefore both must be together — faith and obedience toward God. Faith serves to free us from sin and to make us children of God. Obedience, or love and the works of love, are of service that we manifest ourselves as dutiful children, no more cause God to be angry, and have a good conscience, which those cannot have who are guilty of willful sins and continue in them without any amendment or repentance.

In short, fear God and be pious, and yet do not rely upon such piety, but comfort yourself with our Lord Jesus Christ, and then you will be out of danger. For such faith helps you against sin and death. And since God has commanded obedience, He will also be pleased with it; and it does not matter even if such obedience is imperfect in this life. For it is not alone, but connected with Christ, on whose account both the person and the works of such incomplete obedience please God in those who believe, to whom for Christ's sake that is also forgiven which is yet lacking in such obedience.

Thus one must hear Moses and the prophets, that one may learn from them to believe in Christ and to be pious. This the rich man did not do, and must therefore be eternally damned and suffer, together with all those who have Moses and the prophets, but still do not obey their teaching. But those who hear and obey, that is, those who believe in Christ and know that God for His Son's sake would be merciful unto us, not reckon our sins against us and save us, and who accordingly live in the fear of God, do not obey the devil and their own flesh, but take heed to the Word and will of God, they belong, with Lazarus, into Abraham's bosom, and shall be eternally saved.

May God grant this unto us for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, through his Holy Spirit. Amen.

Second Sunday After Trinity.

Luke 14:16—24.

A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were hidden, Come: for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the high ways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

Contrary to the order of the ancient Church, the Papists have set this Gospel lesson for the first Sunday after Trinity, for the reason that during that week the festival of Corpus Christi was celebrated, as it is still celebrated among them. For they made the supper of which the text speaks refer to the holy Sacrament, desiring thus to establish the communion in one kind, which is one of their chief abuses and an Antichristian perversion of the Sacrament, concerning which we are at variance with them.

Now because the youth are growing up and know nothing about such festivals or pomp, and we old persons are also forgetful, it were well to remind our people in order that, when our young people go into their

churches and see such things, they may not take offence at them, but be able to say that it is not right that they thus triflingly carry the holy Sacrament about, and in connection with it dispense lying indulgences. They have not the intention of thereby honoring the Sacrament; for then they would carry the whole Sacrament or both kinds; but that they, to the shame and disgrace of the Sacrament, may be honored thereby. They seek thus to maintain a distinction, and exhibit a priestly estate as especially exalted before God above that of common Christians, because the clergy alone use the whole Sacrament in both kinds, receiving both the body and blood of Christ, whilst the other Christians, as inferior people, must be satisfied with but one part of the Sacrament.

This distinction the Papists endeavored, by this festival, to establish among the people, and thus to honor their own estate above all others. But by so doing they brought shame and disgrace upon the holy Sacrament and upon the Lord Jesus Christ, who had not instituted His holy Sacrament for an especial estate aside from that of common Christians; as he had not suffered and died for a particular estate either, but had done so for the comfort of His Christian Church, which is not divided, but is one body, He Himself being the Head, whilst the members, as to their life and nature, are all alike, though they have different offices.

This great and injurious abuse we should not overlook, but point out, especially because the Papists hold to their wicked ways with great impenitence and persistency. For how does the Sacrament come to be used for the purpose of making a distinction among Christians? when Christ certainly instituted it for the comfort of conscience and the strengthening of faith; and furthermore designed that it should be a covenant by which Christians are most intimately united, so that all may be as one bread; not merely because they have one God, one Word, one Baptism, one Sacrament, one hope, and all grace and gifts of Christ in common and without distinction, but because they are also one body externally in which one member is to serve, help, counsel and sympathize with the other, etc.

This use of the Sacrament the Papists have destroyed altogether by claiming it as a whole only for themselves, and thus forming a party that pretends to be better than common Christians. And in order that common people may not despise the Sacrament in one kind, but learn to honor it, this festival was observed annually for eight days, and the one kind, that is, the

wafer, was carried through the town with great pomp and music and cymbals and stringed instruments, causing the people to look on in astonishment and to conclude that though the estate of the priesthood was more glorious before God, yet they also had something to show.

For this purpose also they have been using this Gospel lesson, though it does not agree with the Sacrament in one kind. As though the man in our text had made a dry supper, giving some thing to eat but nothing to drink; although they themselves sing: *Venite, comedite panem meum, et bibite vinum meum*; that is, Come and eat my bread and drink my wine; and yet give but one kind, and keep the cup for themselves. However, this is the way God is always treated. Whatever He institutes or orders, must be perverted and abused by the devil and his adherents. This has been the case with the Sacrament also, which is still on this festival shamefully abused by the Papists.

As we have said, they do not keep this festival in honor of the Sacrament, else they would carry about both kinds, that is, the whole Sacrament; but they do it in honor of themselves. They extol the Sacrament, not for our benefit, but for the purpose of teaching us the difference between priests and lay-members. In other things in which God Himself has made a difference it is well for us to observe it. Let a wife be a wife and a husband a husband; let a civil government be distinguished from its subjects; and so in other temporal estates.

But it is not right to make distinctions and to claim a better Baptism and a better Gospel for the pope, bishops, St. Paul or St. Peter, than other Christians have, because God has made no such distinctions, but has abolished them. Therefore it is wrong for them to have a better Sacrament than other Christians, because our Savior Jesus Christ has not instituted the Sacrament to make distinctions among Christians, but to put them on an equality, in like manner as He has given Baptism and the Gospel to be enjoyed by all alike.

This much I had intended to say briefly about this matter, for the sake of our youth and of ourselves, in order that every one may guard against the abomination which the papacy has introduced, causing divisions in Christendom which God has united. We are condemned and persecuted because we refuse to be made mice and rats, and are not satisfied to eat

without drinking, or to take one part of the Sacrament only. We have dropped this festival in our Church altogether, because our opponents have perverted it for idolatrous purposes, in direct opposition to the order and institution of Christ, thereby bringing dishonor upon the holy Sacrament and manifest injury upon Christendom. We are determined to maintain the unity of Christians, who are all favored alike, all distinctions having been removed. May this suffice for the young and the illiterate. We will now proceed to consider our Gospel lesson.

After the miracle by which the Savior, in the house of a Pharisee, healed a man afflicted with the dropsy, Christ teaches the people. But the Evangelist says that “they watched Him.” Hence He begins to lecture them, one and all, about their pride and vanity, and about their choosing out the chief rooms, until at last He also approaches the host, telling him how to invite his guests; that he shall not bid the rich who in this life may thank him for it and bid him again, but the poor who may bid him again in the life to come.

One of them, who claims to be more learned than Christ Himself, hereupon exclaimed: “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of heaven.” As though he would say in his great wisdom: Your preaching is altogether in vain; if it depends on preaching, I would be able to do it too, and perhaps better than you. I consider it the very best of sermons when I say: “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of heaven.” The Savior rejoins: I will tell thee and those like thee, what kind of blessed people you are: “There was a man who made a great supper and bade many; but they made excuse and would not come.” This is a blow intended for him, as though the Savior would tell him: You have a great deal to say about a man that shall eat the bread in heaven. You are in great earnest indeed, and an excellent man — one of those who has been bidden, but would not come. Whoever will pay attention to these words will find them sharp and severe. These to whom He is speaking are the worst kind of rogues; they sit at the table, not for the purpose of learning something, but to watch and to catch Him. Then He tells the parable: “A certain man made a great supper.”

This man is our God Himself, a great and rich Lord, who has prepared a feast in accordance with His glorious majesty and honor. He has prepared a supper which is called great and glorious, not merely on account of the host,

who is God Himself, and whose supper would be glorious though it consisted only of pea soup or dry bark; but also on account of the food itself, which is beyond measure great and costly, being the holy Gospel, yea, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He Himself, who has rendered satisfaction for our sins by His death and redeemed us from the misery of eternal death, of the wrath of God, of sin, and of eternal condemnation, is the food presented to us in the Gospel.

This preaching of Christ is the great and glorious supper by which He feeds His guests, sanctifies them through holy Baptism, and comforts and strengthens them through the Sacrament of His body and blood, so that nothing is wanting and an abundance is supplied to satisfy all. This is very properly called a great and glorious supper, on account of the food, which is so costly and richly prepared that no tongue can describe it and no heart sufficiently conceive it. For it is an eternal food and an eternal drink, and those who eat and drink of it shall never hunger nor thirst again, but be satisfied and joyous forever. And this is not for one man only, but for all in the whole world; and if our earth were ten times as large as it is there should be no lack, but enough for all. It is infinite food and eternal drink, for the Gospel says: "Whoever believes in this Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sake was born of the Virgin Mary and for our sins was crucified under Pontius Pilate, who died, descended into hell, arose again from the dead and sitteth on the right hand of God," etc. Whoever believes this, truly eats and drinks of this supper; for to believe in Christ means "to eat and to drink," so that people are thus made satisfied and rendered fleshy, robust, and strong, and made joyous forever.

This supper is truly called " great," because it is so precious and offered to so many, and the food does not become less though so many partake of it. It is a great and strengthening food, which lasts forever and gives eternal life. In this way the Savior gives the hypocrites around the table to understand that the supper of which he is speaking is far different from the supper which they offer unto Him; and that they are rogues and knaves who may babble and talk much, but who despise God, His mercy and eternal life and salvation, and give everything else the preference.

Our text continues: "And bade many." Those "many" who were bidden are the Jews and the whole people of Israel, who, since the time of Abraham, were especially hidden by the prophets. The seed from which the

blessing should come was promised to the patriarch Abraham. Therefore this supper was first proclaimed to him as the father of that people. Afterwards the prophets extended the proclamation, informing the people that God has made all things ready, and diligently repeated His invitation. Therefore St. Paul in his epistles always mentions the Jews first and then the Greeks.

And when the time came that people should come to the supper, that is, the time when Christ was born and should now suffer and arise again from the dead, the “servants,” John the Baptist and the apostles, went out, saying to those that were bidden, to the people of Israel: Dear people, thus far you have been bidden; but now it is time, come, the supper is ready. The Lord Jesus Christ, your Messiah, has been born; He has died and arisen again; therefore do not tarry long; come to the table of the Lord, eat and be merry; that is, accept your promised treasure with joy, who has, according to the promise, delivered you from the curse and from condemnation and has saved you forever. This message was especially delivered to the leaders of the people, who held positions in the government of the Church and of the State. But how did they receive it? “They all, with one consent, began to make excuse.”

This is a lesson for the guests who sat with Christ at the table, especially for the vain babblers who tried to teach Christ and talked much about bread in the kingdom of God, saying: “Blessed is the man that shall eat bread in the kingdom of heaven.” Yea, says Christ, if you wish to know how blessed you are, I will tell you. The bread has already been served up, the supper has been prepared, John the Baptist has come, and I and my apostles bid you to sit down to supper. But you do not only stay away, and let the host with his great supper wait for you, but you also try to excuse yourselves and appear innocent. This is doubly sinful. In the first place you despise the Gospel, and in the second place you even pretend to have done right and to be holy, pious and wise. This is truly a most grievous sin.

It is bad enough not to believe the Word of God, but it is a great deal worse to go a step farther and to despise it, and at the same time even claim to be righteous. This is done also by those who have abused and blasphemed the Sacrament and have given it to us erring Christians only in one form; and yet excuse themselves and claim to have done right; or even condemn and maltreat us and persecute and kill those who insist on having

the whole Sacrament. But let them kindle the fire; who knows but that they themselves will be consumed by it.

The Jews also did thus, and excused themselves, saying: We cannot adopt this doctrine; for it is opposed to the priesthood and the law, which has been given us by God Himself through Moses, and it causes the ruin of our kingdom which God has confirmed; we must see that we maintain our cause. Thus the first excuses himself on account of his piece of ground, another on account of his oxen, and both think that they have done right; the third does not even excuse himself, but merely declines, saying, I cannot come.

The same excuses are made by us against the Gospel; and we are not any better than they have been. First of all they excused themselves on account of the law of Moses, which they endeavored to uphold. And because the apostles preached against the law and maintained that neither their law, nor temple, nor priesthood is needful, because a greater priest, Jesus Christ, has arisen from the tribe of Judah, they would not suffer such preaching, but adhered to their law, as is the case even today. Thus it has come to pass that they are still waiting, and will have to wait till the end of time for the coming of their Messiah, of whom they hope that He will restore the old priesthood and kingdom and everything as it was at the time of David, and that then He shall bless all with plenty.

Christ here points out three classes. The first says: I must needs go to see my piece of ground. These are the first and the best, as among the Jews the whole priesthood and the chief rulers. They say: We must labor, farm the land and gather the harvest; that is, we must govern the people (as Christ also calls preachers of the Gospel husband men, who sow the seed of the Gospel,) and attend to the office of our priesthood, as God has commanded. And because the doctrine of the apostles is opposed to this, it is wrong, and we are certainly excused for not adopting it. Others also, who hold offices in the civil government, excuse themselves by their "oxen." For the rulers are called oxen or bulls. (Many bulls have compassed me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. Ps. 22.) They also have an honest excuse. We have a kingdom and government instituted and created by God; this we must keep and maintain. The third class say: The Gospel is a doctrine forbidding us to be covetous and to strive for plenty, and requires us to give up all, if need be, even life and existence, money and goods, for Christ's

sake; therefore we cannot and will not come; for we must make efforts to keep our own, which God has given us. For to take a wife does not mean to purpose or to do anything dishonorable, but to enter into an holy estate, to stay at home, and seek to make a living, as everyone is bound to do. But the head of a household sins by endeavoring to become rich, and to succeed well in his vocation, whether this be with or without the favor of God.

The Jews merely regarded the promises of Moses that they should receive temporal blessings and be prospered as regards their cattle, lands, wife, children and all they had, if they would fear God and keep His commandments. Therefore they were concerned only to fill kitchen and cellar and to become rich, taking it for granted that then they were pious and that therefore God had blessed them, as is written Psalm 114.

Just in the same way our Papists excuse themselves and say: The doctrine is true, but we must still adhere to the Church and her established administration. And again, we must preserve obedience to the civil government, in order to prevent discord and revolution. Thus they hesitate, like the Jews, to accept the Gospel, lest they should thereby lose their Church, or civil authority, whilst in fact the Gospel alone establishes the true Church and prevents all undue power and revolution. Covetousness also exerts its influence. Because they see nothing but poverty and persecution accompanying the Gospel, they cannot by any means persuade themselves to accept it, but say, We have taken wives and therefore cannot come. Yet they want to be Christians, claim to have done right, desire to be looked upon as pious bishops, pious princes and pious citizens.

But how will they fare in the end? Just like the Jews. They too held to their law, priesthood, kingdom, and possessions, until at last they came to naught, losing one after another, and are now scattered over foreign countries and sit uneasy in their houses. This is their reward for which they have been laboring. They did not want the supper, but preferred their kingdom, priesthood and houses to the Gospel. Therefore they lost all three and received the sentence: "None of those that were hidden shall taste of my supper." Consequently they have lost both, their temporal possessions here on earth and the great supper in heaven. And this will be the reward of our adversaries also.

Thus did our Lord lecture the wise doctor and his companions when at meat, and pointed out to them their relation to God, as indicated by the words: “Then the master of the house being angry said to the servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city,” etc.

This is as much as to say: Because you consider it of greater importance to look at your lands and your oxen and to take wives than to come to my supper, that is, because you prefer your priesthood, your kingdom and your riches to my Gospel, therefore will I give you up to lose all, and will seek other guests. Therefore He says to His servant: “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.”

This was done among the Jews. Because great lords, princes and priests and the most prominent among the people refused to accept the Gospel, for reasons above stated, our Lord God chose humble fishermen, the poor, needy and despised little flock. As St. Paul also says, 1 Cor. 1: “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are,” etc.

According to this passage, God rejected all that was nice, holy, rich and mighty, because they refused to accept His Gospel, and chose foolish and simple persons and the very lowest, such as Peter, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, etc., poor fishermen and beggars, whom nobody considered worthy to be servants of the priests and princes of the people. These were left like dregs, and, as Isaiah says, like sediment of the good and precious wine, the best of the people, priests, princes, the rich and mighty, having been poured away, like a cask of good wine, and leaving nothing but the dregs or sediment, as the Lord here calls the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind. These are here favored and honored, are pleasing in the sight of God and are His dear guests, whilst other high and great people would not come.

When the Pharisee says: “Blessed are they that eat bread in the kingdom of heaven,” the Savior gives His assent, saying: Yes, they are blessed; but

you and those like you care more for pieces of ground and oxen; therefore I assure you, that a supper is prepared, of which only the poor shall partake, as the text says: *Pauperes evangelizantur*, because you mighty, holy and wise people do not care for it. Therefore they have found that both priests and princes have been cast away like the best of wine, because they so firmly clung to their oxen, grounds and wives; hence the poor beggars have come to the Gospel or the glorious supper in their stead.

This serves the Jews right, and especially the one who pretends to be very wise and talks about eating bread in heaven, but who clings to his priesthood and kingdom in preference to Christ and His Gospel. It is the great mistake of his heart to suppose himself sure of heaven without Christ, and to expect God to tell him and all Jews: Come, Jews, and especially ye priests, saints, princes and rich citizens, the supper is prepared for you. Yes, He tells them, it is true, you have been bidden; but you do not heed the invitation; you excuse yourselves, and claim, besides, to have taken the right course. Therefore I will cast you away and choose rather the most humble of the people, even if I should not get any except the despised, miserable, maimed and halt.

The same shall be experienced by our adversaries, who are not saved by the fact that they are great and holy bishops and mighty princes and lords, and who have not the least idea that God will cast them away, and save only the little flock in the despised rat-hole of Wittenberg that have embraced the Gospel. Yes, my dear friend, if God did not spare His own people who had such great and glorious promises, but cast away the chief among them and saved the dregs only, neither will He spare thee. The fact that you are considered great, holy and mighty will not enable _ you to eat bread in heaven; but the poor shall have the Gospel preached unto them. Our Lord God is infinitely greater, mightier, wiser and holier than all kings and all devils put together; therefore He does not care for your holiness and power. And if you will arise against Him and heinously despise His Word, He also will arise against you and put to shame all your wisdom, power and holiness.

Thus far the text is directed only against the Jews. For the Savior speaks about the maimed and the halt on the streets and in the lanes of the city. And the Jewish nation is called a city, because they have been a well regulated and organized people, having their laws, worship, temple, priest,

kings, all instituted and arranged by God Himself through Moses. Now He sends His servant to the highways and commands him to gather in all he finds, even the beggars along the hedges and everywhere. "And the lord said unto the servant: Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."

These are the heathen, who did not live in cities, nor did they have any worship of God, but were idolatrous, and did not know either themselves nor God. Their home is a public place upon the highways and in the fields where the devil roams at large. Go thither, he says, "and compel them to come in." The world is always opposed to the Gospel and can not suffer its doctrine, and yet the Lord wants His house filled with guests; for He has prepared His feast and must have guests to eat, drink and be joyful, even if He must make them out of stones.

Here we observe also that the Lord Jesus preserves the world so long for our sakes, though He would have sufficient reason, on account of our sins, to destroy it any moment. But He does not do this, because He desires more guests, and because of the elect who also belong to this supper. And because His servants bring us the Gospel, it is evident that we, having been baptized and led to believe, are also to partake of this supper. For we are the people about the hedges, the blind, poor and lost Gentiles.

But how are we compelled to come in? God certainly does not wish any forced service. He compels us simply by preaching to all men: "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." Here He points out both heaven and hell, death and life, wrath and grace, and makes us conscious of our sins and the dreadful estate in which we are, and causes us to feel alarmed; because we learn that man is subject to the devil and condemned, wherever he lives and moves, from youth up.

This is a part of that "compelling," by which We are made to feel the wrath of God, but are induced also to ask for grace and help. When, by the preaching of the Word, our hearts are alarmed and broken, He desires that this also should be preached: Beloved, do not despair on account of your sins and the terrible curse resting upon you; but go and be baptized and hear the Gospel. Then you will learn that Jesus Christ has died for you and rendered satisfaction for your sins. If you believe this you are safe against

the wrath of God and eternal death, and are permitted to partake of this glorious supper, and eat, live and grow robust and strong.

To frighten on account of sin we may truly call “compelling;” not as the pope compels with his anathema. He does not rightly frighten the conscience, as he does not teach the true nature of sin, but carries on his foolery, claiming that whoever does not observe his ordinances and institutions of men shall be under the curse. The Gospel however begins by revealing sin and the wrath of God and showing that all of us, without a single exception, are sinful and wicked. This our Lord commands to be preached when He says to the apostles: “Go and preach repentance.” Repentance however cannot be preached except by declaring that God’s wrath is upon all men, because all men are full of unbelief, contempt of God, and other sins.

This wrath is intended to terrify them and to make the conscience timid and fearful, so that they compel themselves, saying: O Lord, what shall I do to be delivered from this misery? When a person is thus terrified and feels his misery, it is time to tell him: Sit down at the table of the rich master of the house and eat, for many tables are still vacant and an abundance of food is prepared; that is, be baptized and believe in Jesus Christ that He has redeemed you. There is no other remedy by which you can be delivered. Thus the wrath of God ceases, and the heavens shower down pure grace, mercy, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life.

The words, “Compel them to come in,” are beyond measure sweet and consoling to the poor and unfortunate multitude of those who are compelled, and who like ourselves were lost and condemned heathen; for by these words God displays and exhibits His infinite love and grace. And it must indeed be an unspeakable love of God that in these words He expresses His great anxiety for our salvation and commands not only to admonish and kindly to call poor sinners to this supper, but also to compel them and to urge to them come, and not to cease doing this until they are brought in to the supper. From this it is very evident that He will not have them cast away or be lost, if they do not themselves, by willful contempt and stubborn impenitence, resist such compelling. God is, as Taulerus says, infinitely more desirous to help and to give than we can be to ask and to receive, and He asks nothing of us but that we open our hearts and accept His grace.

But this “compelling” is very necessary, both by the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. For without it we would continue in our hardened state, without repentance, under the wrath of God in our sinful nature, and in the kingdom of the devil. But again, when we are made to feel the terror of God’s wrath we are too timid and fearful to accept, and to believe that He is ready to bestow upon us such infinite grace and mercy, always fearing that we will be excluded and be cast away on account of our sins and great unworthiness. Therefore He Himself must command and order that this urging and compelling be continued in every way possible, both by pointing to the wrath of God for the wicked, and to His grace for believers. Wrath and repentance urge men to run and cry for grace. And this is the road which leads to the supper. Thus Jews and Gentiles are gathered and united into one Church, all being called poor and miserable people, and maimed and halt. After being terrified they accept the Gospel heartily and with joy.

Those who will not submit to this, be they ever so wise and prudent, have their sentence in the words: “They shall not taste of my supper;” that is, the wrath of God shall remain upon them, they shall be condemned on account of their unbelief. God does not respect their wealth, wisdom or holiness. And though they feel safe and apprehend no danger, yet they shall find that the sentence of the Lord: *Non gustabunt*, “they shall not taste of my supper,” will be carried out. Those of us, however, who are troubled on account of, our sins, and do not refuse but accept the grace of God offered by Christ in the Gospel, receive grace for wrath, righteousness for sin, and eternal life for eternal death.

Such a dreadful judgment, as we see, is passed today on Turks and Jews, and no savor of the Gospel is left them; nay, it is disgusting and horrible to them, and they will neither hear nor suffer it. The same is the case with our popes and bishops; they do not smell this food, much less will they eat of it and be satisfied; whilst we, having come in possession of the doctrine by the special favor of God, become strong and vigorous and joyful, and are merry in the house of God and at His supper. God grant that we may remain faithful until our end. Amen.

In this parable the Lord admonishes us highly to value the Gospel and not to join the company of those who imagine that they are shrewd, wise, powerful and holy. Their judgment is here fixed; they shall be cast out and

never taste of the supper, as they were cast out in the Jewish nation, only the dregs being left. Thus it will be with us, if we choose our lands, oxen, wives, or spiritual (as they now speak), or civil honors and temporal possessions, in preference to the Gospel.

“They shall not taste of my supper.” Few are the words, but they are plain and explicit. As though the Lord would say: "My supper is worth something; yea, it is better than your oxen, lands, houses or wives. You may now despise it and prefer as more precious your lands, oxen and houses; but the hour shall come when you shall have to leave oxen, land and houses, and when you would gladly taste of my supper. But then you shall be told: My friend, you come at an improper time; I cannot now wait upon guests; go therefore to your land, oxen and houses; perhaps they can furnish you a better supper, seeing that you have so securely and proudly refused mine. It is true, I had made full preparations for you, but you have despised it. If you have made better preparations, then eat and be merry; but as for my supper, you shall not taste of it.

It will be a severe, dreadful and insufferable judgment when God's supper shall be called eternal life, and their land, oxen and houses, everlasting torment; and when this judgment that they shall not taste of His supper shall be final, from which no appeal shall be allowed forever. No repentance or regret shall then do any good, nor any return be possible. Therefore these words, by which the master of the house expresses his wrath, are pointed and dreadful. It is the manner of mighty lords and people of high position, not to use many words when they are angry; but every word which they do speak is weighty, and their intentions are more grave than they are able to express in words. How much more are the words of the Almighty expressive of a fearful wrath which shall never be quenched.

And still we act as though these hard and dreadful words were spoken by a child or a fool, at which we might laugh and mock, or as though God were jesting or making sport. We do not hear nor understand the words of our text which plainly say, “He was angry,” having spoken in great wrath, and that He is no child and no fool, but God and Lord over all, before whom it is meet, as the Scriptures say, that even the mountains tremble and quake in their foundations, and that seas and waters flee before Him. But there is no creature so hardened and perverse as man, who is not afraid in the least, but despises and mocks at these things. We however have given warning, and

this is our glory. For in the last day all the world will have to bear witness that they have heard and seen it through our testimony. Nor do we care that they accuse us of heresy. This we will bear and gladly thank them for thus deriding our testimony. For by so doing they confess that they have surely heard, read and seen it. More I do not ask of them. By acknowledging that they have heard it, they testify that we have not kept silent. And if we have not kept silent, but have diligently and faithfully taught and preached, so that even our enemies say that we have been doing too much of it; then let Him judge us who has made it our duty to do so, and the god who urges them to condemn us may defend them. The name of God will prevail. And it will be made manifest in due time which is the true God, the true Christ, and the true Church.

For the world there can be no better government than that of the devil or the Papists. So the world would have it. The demands of the devil are obeyed with great readiness. The will of God, however, both as regards Church and State, is not respected, but everywhere opposed, so much so that if I could make a division between the world and the Church, I would cheerfully help to subject the world to the pope and the devil. However, Christ our Lord will do this and many other things, and keep His supper far enough from the world and the devil. Amen.

Third Sunday After Trinity. Luke 15:1-10.

Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And He spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just per sons, which need no repentance. Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

This is one of those comforting Gospels which is preached all the year round. In it the Savior teaches us that His office is that of a shepherd who is to follow and seek to restore the lost sinner, and to save him from falling a prey to the wolf, that is the devil, and from eternal condemnation. Such truths the Savior was preaching in the presence of publicans and sinners who had come to hear Him. When this was observed by the Scribes and Pharisees they murmured, put an evil construction upon it, and took it as an evidence of carelessness. For a pious man it is becoming, they thought, to associate with none but pious people. However, the Lord defends His action

in a masterly way. He tells them that He is doing nothing more than others do even in matters of less importance. He refuses to accept the given rebuke of the Pharisees and defends His actions as being perfectly right.

The important question here is: How are sinners to be approached and treated? As two different parties, though both pretend to know the Word of God, here meet, so their answer to the above question is different. The Scribes and Pharisees know nothing of the Word of God, except what Moses teaches them in the law. The law, however, teaches throughout: God is merciful to those who are pious and keep His commandments, but, on the other hand, will punish the wicked who do not keep His commandments. Therefore the Scribes and Pharisees draw the inference, that it does not become any man to deal with sinners otherwise than God does. And because God is angry with sinners and does not accept them, it becomes pious people not to accept them either, but to let them go their way.

The same conclusion also is drawn by our own reason. As soon as a man arrives at a true knowledge of his sin, he is inclined to think that God is angry, that there is no grace for him, but that all calamities must come upon him. This is seen in Adam and Eve. As soon as they had eaten the forbidden fruit, they felt accused in conscience of having sinned against God, and therefore hid themselves and did not want to be seen. This also is noticed in little children. When they know that they have done wrong, they will hide themselves. It is the nature of sin to make the heart timorous, so that it fears wrath and punishment. On the other hand, where a man is convinced of his innocence, he feels secure, and cares nothing, though others condemn, for the heart is confident in its innocence, and doubts not that the guilty one will be found out and the innocent will escape.

As a heart that feels itself guilty can not, on that account, do otherwise but give way to fear and to despair of all grace, so here the Pharisees judge concerning sinners. They know that publicans and sinners have thus far been following a sinful occupation, and now dread the conclusion: Nobody ought to associate with knaves nor show them any favor; for God himself does not favor them, but rejects them; He wants only pious, God fearing persons, who are not burdened by such gross sins.

But consider, if such opinion were right, that God has no patience with poor sinners, but will inflict punishment upon them, what would become of

us? Where would He have His people and a Church? For although not all be given to gross external vices, many a husband, thank God, has committed no adultery, and many a hand has not killed nor stolen nor done anything which is dishonest and wicked; yet, before God, we must all confess that we are sinners. We see and experience that within our hearts there is nothing good, though the hand, mouth and other members of one may be more blameless than the members of another. God, however, judges the heart. If He would withhold His grace and reject the sinner and have nothing to do with him, as the Pharisees here decide according to the law, it would follow inevitably that no man could be saved. That their argument proves too much and that their opinion is erroneous, the Pharisees themselves will have to confess.

For this reason our Lord Jesus Christ expresses another judgment, refutes the answer of the Pharisees altogether, and arrives at the opposite conclusion; namely, that God is no enemy of the sinner, and that He does not desire his death, for which reason He, the Lord Jesus, could not be the enemy of sinners either. He has come into the world to seek and to save the sheep that had been lost. This example should be followed by all men, especially by the ministers of the Gospel; as what is lost in the house is diligently sought, so should they be ever active in seeking those who are lost spiritually.

This is a doctrine and preaching far different from the doctrine of Moses and the preaching of the law. It has not originated in our hearts, but has been brought by the Son of God from heaven; as also John the Baptist saith: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." For this will of God, that He is not angry with sinners, that He will not condemn them on account of sin, but much rather be gracious unto them and save them, is unknown to all men. We rather know and feel the contrary. For, as we have said before, sin always causes us to be afraid of God. But now our dear Lord Jesus, by His Gospel, teaches us a different treatment of sin before the judgment of God; that God will not be the enemy of sinners, but will graciously accept them, and that there will be joy before the angels in heaven over those sinners who repent and are converted.

This doctrine we should the more earnestly heed, because our reason teaches the reverse, so that we may comfort and support ourselves against

an evil conscience and against sins. Whoever will resort in such temptations of conscience to his own heart, reason or understanding will surely be altogether helpless and will fall into despair. Therefore all depends on this, that we, contrary to our hearts and conscience, admit the teachings of the Savior, and say: I am a poor sinner, this I can not and will not deny; but I will not despair on that account, as though God did not want me; because my Lord Jesus Christ saith that a sinner is like a sheep that has strayed from the shepherd and is now lost in the wilderness. Such a lost sheep He will not leave in its lost condition, but will seek it and return it to the flock. In these words the Savior assures us that He will not reject us on account of sin, but that He will diligently seek to deliver us from sin and to make us partakers of His grace.

The Gospel in other places points out ample reason why God will not cast away sinners. In St. John, chap. 3, we learn, that God is no enemy of the world, but that He so loveth the world, that He gave His only begotten Son as a Redeemer in order that the world, by such a sacrifice, may be comforted and not despair on account of sin. Although God could have helped us in some other way, yet He chose to redeem us by His only begotten Son, who took upon Himself our sin. and paid its penalty, so that we have no reason to doubt the sufficiency of His ransom. For it is evident, that God must have more pleasure in the sufferings and death of His Son, than He can have displeasure in us and our sin.

Besides these reasons, the Lord Jesus expresses in our Gospel lesson a peculiar thought in regard to these matters. He tells us that He cannot do otherwise than to be with sinners, to seek them, and to do all that is necessary for their salvation, that it is with Him as with us men. When a rich man who has ten thousand dollars loses a thousand by theft or otherwise, he feels as though he had lost all. That which he has left does not afford him as much comfort or pleasure, as the portion which is lost gives him trouble. This is our nature, and may be called improper, as far as temporal things are concerned; for here we observe that God leaves us more than He permits the devil to take from us. Hence we should not suffer ourselves to be troubled so much on account of temporal loss, but comfort ourselves because we retain something or even the largest portion, and because God can provide for us daily and increase our possessions.

This disposition I also have, our dear Lord saith. Sinners are my purchased and earned goods and possession; I have purchased them by my sufferings and death, and it is impossible that I should not be grieved and do all to restore them, in case they go astray and forsake me. I have paid a great price for them, and cannot but be sorrowful if they fall a prey to the devil after all. Therefore, as soon as one sheep goes astray, I can not help but make the impression as though all the rest did not concern me; I must follow up the lost one and seek it and save it from being caught by the wolf.

So a woman who has many children loves them all and is not willing to lose one of them. If one of them takes sick, this sickness will make a difference between this child and all the rest of the children. The sick one will be the dearest to its mother, and she will take care of it more than of all the rest. If now we would judge the love of the mother by her care, we would have to say: This mother loves only the sick child, not those who are well. So, the Lord says, it is with me in regard to sinners.

Here we have the heart of the Lord Jesus described in a most friendly and lovely manner. It is impossible to present Him in a more charming and pleasing light, because of the anxiety, care, trouble and labor which He devotes to the restoration of poor sinners. He refers us to our own hearts, that we may realize how we feel when we lose anything which is dear to us. This, He saith, is the condition of my heart: it is tossed and restless when I see the devil leading a poor soul into sin and misery.

For this purpose also the Savior makes use of the parable concerning the lost sheep and the good shepherd. There is no condition more miserable than that of a sheep that has left the good pasture and strayed from its shepherd. It can not help itself, and is in danger every moment to be caught and devoured by the wolf that is watching for it. In such danger the sheep is helpless, and can do nothing to protect and save itself. A sheep is the most defenseless among all animals. Such also is the helpless condition of a sinner whom Satan has enticed from God and His Word and led into sin. In this condition he is not safe for a moment, because our enemy, the devil, as St. Peter saith, like a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. In such a danger it is our only comfort to have a Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, who interests Himself in our behalf and seeks us, not for the purpose of punishing us on account of sin and of casting us into hell — no, this is the object and purpose of the devil — but for the purpose of finding

us, laying us on His shoulders rejoicing, and carrying us home, where we shall be safe against the wolf and enjoy the very best of care and pasture.

How such seeking of the sinner is done you all know; it is done by His Word, which is preached and spread everywhere. From this we learn what a misery and burden sin is, which brings eternal damnation on us; but it teaches us also the great fact that God, out of paternal love for us disobedient children, was moved to deliver us from such misery by His Son Jesus Christ, and that He requires nothing of us, except to partake of such deliverance with thankful hearts, to believe in the Lord Jesus, to observe God's Word, and to render cheerful obedience thereto.

When this is heard by the lost sheep or poor sinners and they begin to trust in God through such preaching, they pause and ask: Why was I such a foolish and miserable man that, having such a gracious God, I did not yield to His will, but submitted to the devil and was led by him into disobedience? What good will all the money do me, after which I am craving? Would it not be better to enjoy a moderate temporal gain, which is considered reasonable by everybody, and which may be enjoyed in honor and with the sanction of God, than to be accused of unreasonable usury and to enjoy neither success nor happiness. What good does all celibacy and licentious living afford? Would it not be better to be married and to have a good conscience than to live a single life in sin and disgrace and be in constant dread of the terrible judgments of God? What good does all riotous living and intemperance in eating and drinking do you, when followed by bodily disease, sudden death and destruction? Hasten to return and break off such sinful habits, ere God's wrath overtakes you. God is willing to be gracious unto you, if you were only willing to accept His offer, and did not sink deeper into wrath by such willful sin.

Those who heed such warnings and put their trust in Christ, are found, like lost sheep, by Jesus the good Shepherd. They listen to His voice and apply to Him in all confidence; and He takes them upon His arms, forgiving them all their sins, and affords them all shelter and defense against the wolf and other wild beasts.

Here we learn the great difference among sinners. In one thing they are all alike: they serve the devil and are disobedient to God. But in an other respect they differ. Some, and that the most of them, remain, as they are by

nature, in sin, and do not change the least, though they are preached to and instructed ever so much. They comfort themselves and say: There is no danger, God is merciful and will be glad at any time to receive me when it suits me to ask pardon; I will first fully enjoy the world and afterwards go to church, hear the preaching of God's Word and be pious. Sheep like these hear the voice of the Shepherd, but they do not want to be found. What are the consequences? They go astray more and more every day; they are entangled more and more in the snares of the devil, without being able in the least to free themselves. This we have occasion to observe in the world always. People are even drowned in avarice, licentiousness, rioting and other sins; it becomes their second nature to live in their sins, and they think they cannot live in any other way. We should guard against such a course, but rather flee to the good Shepherd as soon as we hear His voice; that is, repent of our sins, not continue to live in them, but return and amend our ways, and trust that our Shepherd, Jesus Christ, will not leave us in the wilderness, but accept of us and reconcile us to the Father.

Repentance, however, does not mean merely to amend our ways externally and to appear pious, but also to trust in divine grace, for Christ's sake, and to believe the forgiveness of sin. Such sinners the Savior will accept. He would gladly accept the others also, but they do not want His help, therefore He must let them go. Because they do not want to be found, they may remain in their lost condition as long as they please, and see what becomes of them.

Thus our Gospel lesson not only assures the poor sinner that their good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, will seek and accept them as sheep having gone astray; but also teaches us our duty toward this Shepherd, that we should hear His voice and follow it. This also is taught by the narrative of our Gospel. The people had been publicans and sinners, but they drew near Him to hear Him. And what does the Savior tell them? Nothing else but that God is merciful to poor sinners in Christ Jesus, and wants to save them. All He asks of them is to suffer themselves to be entreated; not to go astray any farther, but to return when they hear the voice of the Shepherd, and not to resist the Lord Jesus when He offers to carry them back to the fold, as He has already paid and rendered satisfaction for their sins and reconciled them to the Father. And because God has done so much for us and has bestowed

His grace abundantly upon us, it is meet that we should not despise His directions and disregard His Word, but do something to please Him.

Let us therefore well notice these teachings, in order that we may be prepared against the temptations of the devil and our own hearts, and overcome all desponding thoughts as though God would have no patience with poor sinners, but condemn them. For such thoughts are to be found in the heart of every one. Against these we should be well armed with the Word of God, and especially should we take to heart the figure which the Lord Himself here uses, namely, that He is a Shepherd, who causes His Word to be preached in all the world, in order that the lost sheep may hear and be saved.

Therefore, if you know yourself to be a lost sheep, which has been enticed and led astray by the devil far from the right way, then take to heart this sermon of Christ. For your sake it is preached, in order that you may repent, that is, that you may be comforted by the Lord Jesus and His grace, and be freed from the snares of the devil and become better. As you fear the devil, so be afraid of neglecting the voice of the good Shepherd, but return at once and hasten to follow Him; then you are safe, and the angels in heaven will rejoice, who will then delight in being with you and by their presence and protection defending you against all the dangers of the devil; whilst the impenitent sinners cause all manner of sorrow, grief and sadness to good angels, are deprived of their protection, and are in danger always and everywhere of being lost eternally.

The Lord, however, does not end His teaching with the parable of the shepherd and sheep, but adds another about a woman losing a piece of silver, that others may learn to follow His example, and not to reject the poor sinner, but to seek him and lead him to repentance. The first parable has reference only to our Savior Jesus Christ; for He is the only true and good Shepherd who does not despise the sheep, but gives His life for them, in order that they may be defended and safe against the devil. The other parable, however, about the woman, refers to the Christian Church, which has the ministerial office, that poor sinners may be led to repentance and may be delivered from eternal death and condemnation and be saved. Like the Shepherd, she rejoices when she finds the piece of silver. She lights a candle, the Word of God, and sweeps the house, that is, teaches how we may become pious and comfort ourselves before God and His judgment by

the grace of God in Jesus Christ. By this kind of preaching the Church finds the lost piece of silver.

In this way the Word of God is highly honored and praised as the only treasure which takes away sin and all the misery that is caused by sin, such as death, damnation and hell, that we may be no more sinners and enemies of God, but a joy to the angels in heaven and to all saints on earth. Therefore we should highly esteem the Word of God, cheerfully hear it and take it to heart, and love and esteem those who preach it, in order that we may enjoy its blessed fruit, be saved from our lost and ruined condition, and be happy forever.

May this be granted by the dear and faithful Shepherd of our souls, our dear Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Fourth Sunday After Trinity.

Luke 6:36—42.

Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you mete withal it shall be measured to you again. And He spake a parable unto them; Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.

In the Gospel for today our dear Lord Jesus Christ teaches His disciples and all of us how to conduct ourselves toward our fellowmen and lead a Christian life. For after we have become believers and are called Christians, who are redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ from sin, from death and all evil, we are also to lead a new life and to do what God requires of us. This the Lord expresses in a few words when He saith: "Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

It is well known what it means to be "merciful;" namely, to be a man who is friendly and kind to his neighbor, who sympathizes with him and takes to heart his misfortunes, whether of soul or body, honor or goods, and who endeavors to help him, and does this cheerfully, in deed and in truth.

Such conduct toward our fellowmen the Savior requires of us, which is far different from the conduct or mercy of the publicans and sinners, as the Savior explains in the foregoing verses. Publicans and sinners show mercy one toward another, love one another, perform acts of benevolence and friendship one toward another and lend to one another, but all for the purpose of receiving such favors in return. It is a false mercy to do good in order to receive the same and more favors in return. We, however, who want to be Christians, should “be merciful as also our Father in heaven is merciful;” not merely toward those who are our friends, but toward everybody, even toward those who are our enemies and persecute us, and whom we might not consider worthy of even a friendly word. This we know is a difficult task; and we are inclined to ask: What do I care for the knave, whose conduct toward me has been so very offensive? I know his wicked tongue; should I help him? I would rather see the lice devour him. Thus our nature induces us to show such a knavish mercy that will do good to our friends only, and to no others.

Our Savior teaches us that this is not the way of mercy. If you want to be a Christian you must be merciful even toward those who have offended you; you must be merciful as also your Father in heaven is merciful, otherwise you can not be His children nor my brethren, who has redeemed you with my blood from sin and death. You have offended your Father in heaven shamefully; you have not kept one of His commands, but have transgressed them all, so that He would have more than enough reason to say: Should I give my Son for such desperate knaves as they are? Their part shall be with the devil in the bottomless pit of hell, because they do not fear, love and trust me, but rather despise, blaspheme and hate me, swear and curse in my name, reject and condemn my Word, are disobedient to parents and magistrates, are murderers, fornicators, thieves, avaricious, usurers, perjurers; in short, they commit every thing bad, therefore let them go where they belong. Thus, the Savior saith, God might speak. Yet He does not do it, but, notwithstanding all your wickedness, He continues to be kind and merciful; does not merely give life and existence, food and drink, wife and children, and all the necessaries of this earthly life, but also His Son and eternal life.

Such mercy we also are here taught to exercise. And if some one has offended thee and done something displeasing to thee, how insignificant are

such deeds when compared with thy many actions against God. But His mercy is so great that He gives His only begotten Son to His enemies, that He might redeem them from sin and death, and instead of justly punishing us and sending destruction by hail, thunder and lightning and hell-fire, He gives us soul and body and all the necessaries of life. Do thou therefore learn to follow His example and be prepared to say: Though some persons have very much offended me, so that I could justly suffer them to be eaten by worms, yet this shall not take place if I can prevent it. Such mercy would be heathenish, but not Christian. If he has done evil or wrong toward me, who knows in what way I have deserved it? I will not take revenge now when I see him to be in need and am able to help him. For thus my heavenly Father deals with me.

We see what outrages the peasants everywhere commit. Even in times of plenty, they take all they can get for the produce they bring to market. And with town people it is the same. Every one is after money, and is anxious to live in luxury and feasting, and at the same time will not stop lying and cheating others whenever the chance is offered. Such conduct might turn us against them, so that if men of this description come to want, one is tempted to think: It serves them right that they are thus humbled. But this is not the language of a Christian. He will not be prevented from doing good to the sufferer because he is wicked. This fact will not induce him to act wickedly likewise. He will rather be like a good tree. If the fruit of a good tree is picked and removed it does not get angry, but will bear some more next year. The Christian will say, if I have done thee good, but thou hast been unthankful and repaid me with evil, thou shalt not thereby induce me to do the same. If thou art like a brier which can do nothing but scratch, be it so; I will not do the same, but be and remain a good vine, bringing forth good fruit.

Thus does my Father in heaven. He does not give cattle, eggs, butter, cheese, house, home, wife, children, money, goods, body and soul, peace, good weather, and all that is needed, merely to the pious and righteous, but also to bad people and rogues. He makes the sun to give us light, though we have deserved only hell-fire. But our good Lord does not give us our deserts. He does not act like a brier or thistle on account of our unthankfulness, but declares: If you choose to be and to remain evil, I will

continue to be good, and will send my sunshine and my rain on the just and unjust, until the time of judgment.

This is the example which our dear Lord and Savior wants us to observe. He wants us to be pious, and not become evil on account of the wickedness of others, like the children of this world, who take revenge. Christians should act differently. They should say to the wicked: Thou art a brier; thy thorns have scratched me badly; yet on that account I will not become a brier also, but will help thee when in need, and will pray God to forgive thee and to change thee into a beautiful and fruitful vine. This is expressed in the words: "Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful," who does the very best even for His worst enemies.

But we must not understand this as if it were forbidden to rebuke sin. Christ here speaks to His disciples, who had no authority to govern. The children of a family, the peasants in a village, the inhabitants of a city, and the princes of an empire are all on an equal footing, none having authority over the other. The government in the house is given to the father or the mother, in the village to the justice, in the city to the mayor, and in the empire to the emperor. Children in the family, peasants in the village, citizens in the city and princes in the empire are all equal; therefore they are required to observe the rule given here by the Lord, according to which they are forbidden to harm each other, but are required to be merciful.

But when we consider persons in various stations, like that of the emperor in the empire as related to the princes and the nobleman or justice as related to the peasants, the exercise of mercy is out of place, because government and the office of correction has been instituted by God, and in this case He wants no mercy exercised, but desires punishment to be inflicted on the wicked. Thus parents ought not to be merciful toward their children when they are wicked, but are to punish them at once. So master and mistress ought not to be merciful toward their servants, but to punish them when they deserve it, and not be too lenient. If they do not do their duty in this respect, they will have to give strict account for it to God.

The command of Christ about mercy has reference to those only who are on an equality; whilst those in unequal positions are commanded to discharge the duties belonging to their respective positions, and should not be prevented to do so by the command about mercy. But where persons are

in the same position, as between peasant and peasant, citizen and citizen, child and child, servant and servant, a Christian should tell his fellow Christian: You have wronged and injured me, may God forgive you this; I am not to punish you on that account. This is exercising mercy.

But if such grievances continue, then report to your father, judge, mayor or prince, and say: Thus I have been abused by this or that person. Only be careful that you do not judge and condemn. No child and no peasant is allowed to strike the other, and no nobleman is allowed to wage war against the other; they all should report to the proper authority and say: Thus I have been injured, and I am not permitted to inflict punishment, which is not my office. Such a proceeding also is mercy; it is making use of the ordinary means to have the wicked restrained in their wantonness by those having the office to do so.

Thus did Joseph (Gen. 37), who saw his brothers to be guilty of many misdemeanors. He did not punish them, because it was not his office, but he reported to his father, saying: Dear father, this has been done by Simeon and that by Levi; see you to it and stay the evil. That was right and proper and a real work of mercy; though Joseph himself was despised on account of it and drew upon himself hatred and envy. For his brothers could not believe that he meant it all well and was practicing a work of mercy. By such reporting he aided in delivering the soul from the devil and the body from the executioner.

Thus it ought to be also among children and domestics. None ought to take revenge, but to report the wrong done to the master or mistress, without bitterness of heart. By so doing one assists the other for the benefit of body, money and goods, yea, and of the soul also, and prevents idleness, carelessness, indiscretion and unfaithfulness. Especially the young ought to be trained in the exercise of this mercy. Whenever they are wronged or see something improper they should not at once resort to the application of the rod, but should approach the evil-doer by saying: I am sorry for you, you should not have done it. This may be called a prayer for the neighbor. If this does not produce amendment, then report to those who have authority to correct and to effect a change for the better. For this purpose God has appointed a sufficient number of persons, such as princes, masters, officers, father, mother, pastors, vicars, and last of all executioners, to punish the

evil-doers. Others who do not hold such offices must not punish, but should exercise mercy, and counsel and help as they are able.

Mark well then, that the command to be merciful is intended for persons of equal positions. Persons of the same position, such as fathers, judges, or princes are to exercise mercy toward each other, but not toward their inferiors. There they have the especial command to punish children, servants, and subjects for the evil which they have done. But persons of equal position are to treat each other in a friendly, kind and sympathizing spirit, are to help, forbear, admonish or report; this we call a Christian proceeding. You should not be offended if for this they revile you and call you traitors, as children and domestics do. Continue to be a fig-tree and a good vine, and do not suffer yourself to be turned into a thorn. Look at the sun. It beholds many a knave who during the past night has committed theft or adultery; but still it continues to be a beautiful sun, though you are a black devil and not worthy to behold it. The sun rather thinks: Though now I must behold your wickedness, I shall also in due time behold you on the gallows. Now you laugh at me and I must light you in your evil deeds; but be careful lest I shall also have to give light at the infliction of punishment, if you do not repent. Experience has taught that God will leave no evil unpunished. Those who desert father and mother will not escape the executioner. You must either repent and do better or you will be punished. If no amendment ensues, God will surely punish.

Many succeed in escaping, wandering through distant lands and avoiding punishment for a while; but if they do not amend, they will be found out as by a miracle and receive their reward yet in time. The common proverb comes true: He that escapes father and mother will not escape the executioner. Whatever father and mother cannot accomplish by the rod, the executioner will accomplish by the rope or sword. If you will not suffer the rod for your correction in life, you may suffer the punishment of death as your deserved reward,

Thus our Lord Jesus Christ wants us to lead a good life and to assist each other, not for mere appearance' Sake, but in deed and in truth. He commands us to be merciful, not like the Gentiles, who are merciful to those only who can help them again, in which case one hand washes the other; but as He Himself is merciful, who pours down upon us abundantly, so that all the world may gather enough; not merely the pious, whom He

might satisfy in one day, but the wicked also. He does not suffer the fountain of His goodness to cease flowing because the great mass is ungrateful, but, on the contrary, He bestows the most and the best portion upon the wicked.

God then, the Savior says, I place before you as an example, and urge you to do good, not merely to your friends, thus showing a piety such as is prevalent among the Gentiles; but also to your enemies, as you see God doing by making His sun shine upon all, even upon murderers, thieves, adulterers, the offal of society, citizens and peasants, who would deserve to be shut out from the light of the sun. But He does not do it, and will not cease to bestow His grace on account of the wickedness of the people.

This example He urges us to follow, saying: Be not offended; do not withdraw your helping hand, as the world is accustomed to do, which says: Whatever I do for the knave is all in vain. Such talk is foolish. To serve friends is nothing extraordinary; even Gentiles are friendly and accommodating as long as they enjoy the same favors. But as soon as favors in return cease, so soon their well-doing ceases also. In their case it is evident that there is no fountain or living spring of love, but water which is lost in the sand, and a heathenish help. You Christians must rise higher and be unwearied in helping even your enemies, though you reap nothing but ingratitude. You must reason in this way, that if they are unthankful, God is able to punish them by the devils and wicked men, by floods, fire, plagues and pestilence. Because I am assured that no evil shall be left unpunished, I will maintain a pleasant and sympathizing heart, which is ready to counsel and to assist.

This may indeed be called a Christian heart and Christian love, such as is not found among the heathens. They do not help, except for a sufficient reward; when this is wanting their love ceases. Christians, on the other hand, are expected to have a fountain which does not cease to flow, though well-doing should be like spilled water.

The Lord then goes on to describe the several parts of mercy, saying: “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.”

He wants us to be true Christians who do not extol the Gospel and faith merely by word, as is the case with those who pretend to be evangelical and

who have a great deal to say about Christ, but who show, on closer inspection, that they are very shallow and without substance. Thus the greater part, even when they are in possession of the Gospel, deceive themselves, and with their false faith fall a prey to the devil. Such a disaster the Savior is desirous of preventing, and holds up to our view not a strange and unknown example, but that of our heavenly Father and of ourselves, which we have experienced and which He Himself has placed before us, that we should do thus also to others.

We all have been under the judgment of God and condemnation on account of our sins. And what has our heavenly Father done with us? Is it not true that He did not desire to judge or condemn you, but has forgiven your sins, removed hell and damnation, and graciously accepted you as His own? Such example you have in yourself and in your person. Follow this and do the same to others. Thus you are a true Christian, who believes in Christ, and will not judge and condemn your neighbor, but forgive him his trespasses against you.

If you are not willing to do this, but like the wicked servant, Matt. 18., receive grace and forgiveness without applying the same to others, you may be sure you are no Christian, and God, who has been merciful to you, will again place you under judgment and condemnation, take from you all gifts already bestowed, and lay to your charge the debt already forgiven. Such shall certainly be the consequence, because it is written: "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged;" that is, if you will not abstain from judging, God will also judge you.

For the world it is exceedingly difficult to abstain from judging. As soon as they are in the least offended by anyone, they are ready to judge, saying: What could I have done more for the knave? I have done this and that for him; this now is the way he repays me. This we may call unmerciful mercy and a doubtful help, judging as soon as the expected acknowledgment is not forthcoming. It is as Gregorius has said: *Vera justitia habet compassiorem, falsa autem est duplex iniquitas*, that is, true piety is compassionate, but hypocritical piety is double unmercifulness. When one gives me a piece of money it is as if he would thereby purchase me and make me his own. In case I say or do any thing which displeases him, or is not to his liking, he will at once throw it up to me and say: Behold I have done this or that for you; should you not also have done me a favor? This is serving for the

purpose of being served again, as is done by the Gentiles, who are thus guilty of judging.

It ought to be thus, that if you do good to some one and he does not recognize it or even rewards you with evil, you may warn him and tell him that by so doing he sins against God; but you should not turn to be his enemy nor judge and condemn him. Of this beware. Commend him to his judge; for you do not know what God will do with him, nor whether he will not be converted. If he is not converted, God has, as said before, many devils, executioners, and wicked people wherewith to punish him when the time comes; as we see here and there an accident occurring unawares; he too shall find his account. Therefore avoid judging, but conclude: If God had dealt with me according to my deserts, I would have had to die in my sins ten, twenty or thirty years ago, as I lived in shameful idolatry and hypocrisy.

So also avoid condemning, for this does not behoove you. You can reprove, instruct, admonish, and report to those whose office it is to judge and condemn. Nothing becomes you except to be merciful, not to judge and condemn, but to forgive. Even if your neighbor would not cease to sin against you, your heart should still be disposed to forgive him, and not to apply force nor take revenge; but rather promote his welfare whenever you can.

This, of course, is painful and difficult. But remember you are a Christian, and must deal more severely with yourself than the unbelievers, if you would remain a Christian. In this the example of our Father in heaven should always be kept in view. If you do good to your neighbor, and he does not acknowledge it, but rather returns evil for good, you have no reason to doubt that God will find him out; leave vengeance to Him, and do what you have been commanded.

We read a story of a degenerated son who had seized his father by the hair and dragged him to the threshold of his house, when his father cried: Stop, stop my son! thus far I once dragged my father; as I have done to him so you now do to me. This is a judgment of God; He knows how to punish wrong, and especially ingratitude. There fore commend all to Him, and do what you have been commanded, not punishing, but. showing mercy. God will not postpone punishment for ever, as is here said: "Give, and it shall be

given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”

The Lord here beautifully sums up our duties, and is desirous of making us good Christians, who always do right. As He has commanded us to be gracious toward poor sinners, even as God is gracious toward us, and not to judge and condemn them, but to leave all judgment unto God, so He here further commands us to assist our neighbor in the time of need by word and act, being assured that however much and bountifully we may give, God will give us more and more bountifully still.

Our heart is thus to become more and more a fountain of love which does not cease to flow because of the thorns, as is the case with that of the heathens. They can never abstain from judging and condemning; when one does anything by which they are offended, they will not forgive until he humbles himself before them and worships them. They will not give unless they expect to receive. Therefore the heavy sentence remains upon them, that God will surely judge and condemn them, and will not forgive them or give to them.

Such misconduct we should avoid, and do to our neighbor as our Father in heaven has done to us. He sets judgment aside and forgives; He neither takes revenge nor condemns, notwithstanding our ingratitude and our returning to Him all manner of evil for good. We should learn of Him. If we do not we have reason to fear the judgment here declared: “With the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.”

Now we must confess that God has meted out to us a very full measure. For if He had measured according to our deserts, we would have received nothing but wrath, trouble and misfortune, and the earth would have swallowed us up as soon as we were born, to say nothing of the misconduct during our whole life. The proper measure for us would have been death and hell.

But what does God do? He puts aside all we have deserved, wrath, displeasure, judgment, death and hell, and gives us heaven, grace, and deliverance from the accusations of the law and our evil conscience. He removes all want and debt, and bestows everything good. This may indeed be called a merciful “measure.” But if afterwards you give a different

measure to others, you may depend upon it that God will measure to you again as you have measured. You stood well before, for God had meted out to you nothing but grace; but now you shall have measured to you as you measure in your ingratitude.

This may seem a singular doctrine, because it appears as though God looked more to the service we render our neighbors than to the service we render unto Him. For as regards Himself He forgives all our sins and will not avenge what we have done against Him. But if, on the other hand, we sin against our neighbor, He is against us and will not forgive us. Therefore we must understand this measuring as applying after we have believed, and not before. Before you believed God did not deal with you according to your merits, but according to His grace. He led you to His Word and promised you forgiveness of your sins. This is the first measure with which God measured unto us, when we first began to believe.

And because we have received such a measure from God, He now tells us: Remember, and measure to others in the same way. If you do not, you shall be treated as you treat others. If you are unmerciful to them, I will also be unmerciful to you. If you judge and condemn, I will judge and condemn you. If you take, but give nothing, I will take and give nothing to you. Here the measure is applied after faith has been wrought. God so earnestly urges good works towards our neighbor, that He will recall all the good He has done for us, if we will not do good to others also.

Whoever therefore would serve God faithfully, should do unto his neighbor as God has done unto him. He should not judge nor condemn, but cheerfully forgive and give, be friendly and helpful wherever he can. If he will not, he will fare like the servant, Matt. 18. It was pure grace that this servant experienced; he was released from all his debt; but when he was not willing to forgive his fellow-servant, who owed him an hundred pence, and would not have patience with him until he could pay him, those ten thousand talents which had been forgiven were again placed to his account; he was delivered to the tormentor, till he should pay all that was due from him.

Now it is true that we do not always apply this rule. We often forget to be merciful; when we should be friendly, we are angry, and when we should speak kindly we curse. But when we thus act contrary to the command of

Christ, we should be careful not to fall into the sin of the Pharisees and persist with an evil conscience; but should at once retrace our steps and remember the example of our heavenly Father, that we too forgive and forget, and not suffer ourselves to be embittered by the unreasonableness or ingratitude of others.

Yet if we are required to forgive, it is necessary also that the person to be forgiven acknowledge his sin and be sorry for it. For it could not be expected that I should forgive the pope and other enemies of the Word; because they think it is right to persecute our doctrine. But if they would confess that they have done wickedly and would promise amendment, they should be forgiven. If we are to forgive sins, these must be recognized. Whoever therefore claims to be right and is not willing to acknowledge his sins, as was the case with Saul against Samuel, can not have forgiveness.

This is the doctrine concerning Christian life, which the Lord holds up to us by the example of our heavenly Father. This doctrine is further illustrated in the parable of the mote and the beam in the eye. As though He would say: I know it to be hard for you; your injury hurts you and you cannot soon forget it; as soon as you meet your adversary or think of him your anger burns; he has done you this and that wrong, and you will say, I wish him every misfortune. But not so, dear children, Christ says. Even if he has injured you or used harsh words against you, it is in truth but a mote and a little thing, an insignificant atom in the eye; whilst you yourself have a beam in your eye if you consider your misdoings toward God. Therefore it requires a great deal to judge and to condemn others. As a general thing the teacher must have more learning than his pupils, else the pupils will learn very little. And what kind of a teacher are you, if you undertake to teach and to judge others, whilst you yourself are just as blamable and as ignorant as those you intend to teach? Before the people, the Lord wishes to say, this will not pass;

how much less will it pass in my kingdom and be fore God, before whom you are all alike blamable. Therefore learn to apply well the doctrine of the parable. When you see, hear or suffer anything, which you do not like to see, hear or suffer, stop at once and say: Patience, it is but a small sin compared to my own; God observes more defects in me than I can observe in others; therefore I will keep silent and forgive, if only God will keep silent and forgive also.

Alas, this is not done. In this world one brother will always reprove the other on account of a mote, whilst there is a beam in his own eye. If you have one thing against your neighbor, God has thousands against you, because you have transgressed His commandments from youth up and have sinned against them times without number. And yet you do not see it, but become enraged and are ready to devour your neighbor on account of a single word which is out of place. Shame on you! You pretend to have a sharp eye, and yet are unable to detect the beam in your own eye.

A Christian should accustom himself to act differently. When he observes a mote in the eye of his neighbor, he should, before judging, first approach the mirror and behold himself; then he would see a beam big enough to make a hog-trough, and would have reason to exclaim: What does this mean? My neighbor offends me once in three months or in six months or in a year, whilst I, as old as I am, have never kept the commandments of God, but transgress them every hour and every moment; how can I be such a desperate rogue? My sins are like huge oak trees, whilst I make more ado about the little mote or atom in the eye of my brother than about my large beams. But this shall not continue, I will see to it that my sins are removed, and will have so much to do in the accomplishment of this that I will even forget the little mote of my neighbor. I have been disobedient to God, to my sovereign, to my father and mother, and to my master, and do not cease to sin; and yet I, miserable man that I am, who sin incessantly, undertake to make of a little word of my neighbor a huge beam.

Thus the Lord would constantly refer us to the example of our heavenly Father, who will not look upon our large beams, in order that we may have patience with the little mote of others, and not judge and condemn. What is there that could move a person, if he is not moved to be merciful by the beautiful and glorious promise that God will remove all judgment and condemnation and readily forgive us, so that there shall be for us no death nor hell, but only grace and benignity, if we will forgive and not judge each other?

And again, if a person is not alarmed and deterred from judging and condemning by the fact, that if he sees the mote in his brother's eye God will find the beam in his eye, he will not be moved, comforted or alarmed by anything else.

Are we not miserable people and great fools, that we will not excuse a single word in our neighbor, whilst God forgives us all our sins, and that we will not desist from judging for a moment so that He may not judge us in all eternity? But what good will it do us if we continue in our evil practice and rather follow the example of the world than the example of our heavenly Father? The consequence will be that we lose grace and choose wrath. For whilst we might have a kind, merciful and lenient God, we ourselves make Him our enemy and cause His wrath and judgment to come upon us.

Such misery we should well consider and lead a Christian life, from which every one, friend and foe, may infer that we are true disciples of Christ, whose heart is a fountain of love which never ceases to flow.

May God our heavenly Father graciously grant this to all through the Holy Ghost, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Fifth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 5:1-11.

And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon Him to hear the Word of God, He stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And He entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And He sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when He had left speaking, He said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto Him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken. And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed Him.

In this narrative St. Luke tells us how Peter and others were called to the Apostolic office. And, indeed, the narrative is very appropriate. For by the extraordinary draught of fishes the Lord wanted to show them how the Gospel would be spread in the world with great power, and would catch men who are in the kingdom of the devil and bring them into the kingdom

of God. For at the close the Lord Himself interprets it, that Peter, Andrew, James and John, from hence forth, shall catch men.

This is a great comfort in the temptations to which all pious ministers of the Gospel are generally exposed. They are apt to suppose the world to be too wicked, that all preaching will be useless and in vain, and that nobody will be converted thereby. This, Christ wishes to say, may be expected from the preaching of Moses; but wherever my Word is preached at my command, it shall accomplish its end, as was the case with the draught of fishes, in which Peter was engaged at my command.

Before, however, the Evangelist begins his narrative, he states that a multitude of pious people followed the Lord Jesus and was anxious to hear Him preach. By this example He would incite us also willingly to hear His Word and zealously to continue in it. For whoever hears the Word of God diligently enjoys two great advantages, which could never be enjoyed without that Word.

The first is that we learn to know God's will, how He is disposed towards us and what He will do with us after this life. It is impossible for man to know these things without the Word of God; for he either proceeds on his way securely and presumptuously, without the fear of God and not believing that God is really angry at sin; or, if he has a sufficient knowledge of this fact from the preaching of the law, he can arrive at no other conclusion than that God will condemn him on account of his sin. But the Word of God teaches that, although God is fearfully angry at the impenitent, yet He will be merciful, deliver from sin and death, and give eternal life to all those who turn to Him by true faith in His Son Jesus Christ. This is one blessing we derive from the Word, which therefore we should cheerfully and diligently hear.

The other is this, that we learn from it how our temporal life, vocation and work, being comprehended in the Word of God and sanctified by it, forms a true service of God with which He is well pleased. Therefore to serve God it is not necessary for a man to engage in something extraordinary in his external life, as the monks have been doing. Let him remain in his temporal calling and do what his rulers, office, and position require of him. In this way God is served aright, and is well pleased, and He will grant success and prosperity.

This is an important doctrine upon which a great deal depends, that we regard our calling as comprehended in God's Word, so that each one may be sure that all he does and leaves undone he does and leaves undone in the name and at the command of God. Thus the soul is prepared to defy the devil, can be of good cheer, and say: I have today done this and that, and I have done it, because I know God has told me and commanded in His Word to do so; I therefore know that it is a good work with which God is well pleased. Who ever cannot speak thus should abandon his work, no matter what it may be; for it is sin and God is displeased with it, as St. Paul saith: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

Here we must know, that whoever does not want to live in uncertainty, like the heathen, but desires so to govern his actions that God may be pleased and to do all in faith, must have and know the Word of God. For faith cannot exist where the Word of God is not. You may wonder what such Word is, that comprehends all vocations and our whole external life. But we can easily tell you. In the first place, there is the fourth commandment: "Honor thy father and thy mother." This commandment embraces all stations of life. For the state of matrimony is the source of all other states. God has made one state depend upon the other; as the state of matrimony must serve all others — for no civil government nor civil well being could exist without it — so again all other states have to serve the state of matrimony.

In the second place, we have besides the Word which comprehends all states, another Word which embraces all works; namely, the Word which commands and requires to love our neighbor as ourselves. These two commandments we should keep in view continually; then our actions will be right according to the Word and commandments of God.

If we merely look at the work it appears to be a small thing that a maiden is engaged in cooking, washing dishes, sweeping the room or in nursing, wiping and bathing little children. For this is done also by heathens and those who are no Christians; but they do it without the Word of God, that is, they do not believe that by their everyday labor they serve the Lord and render obedience to Him — they are ignorant of His command. But a maiden that is a Christian knows from the fourth commandment that God demands such works of us, and is aware also that love for our neighbor requires it. For this reason her work is good and holy and needs no unction.

The Word of God is the true unction or sanctification, as the Lord saith by the holy apostle Paul: “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ.” And again: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord.” Eph. 6:1. Works which do not differ in appearance from the works of heathens, become holy and well pleasing in the sight of God by the Word of God and faith, whilst without such faith and Word God cannot be pleased. Whatever is to be sanctified must be sanctified by the name and Word of God.

The requirement of the fourth commandment affects all callings and works. If they are performed by faith in Jesus, in the name of God and in obedience to Him, they become sanctified and are holy callings and works, well pleasing in the sight of God. If, according to the will of God, you die in the performance of such a calling, you die a blessed death; for you die in the true faith and obedience to God and are a child of God and an heir of eternal life, not on account of your works, but on account of faith which trusts that your person and work are pleasing to God, of which faith such obedience and work are the fruits.

The works of a monk, when he puts on a cowl, is shorn, rises for matins, reads mass, observes special rules in eating, and the like, may have a good appearance, but they are not performed according to the Word of God and are not, therefore, holy works. But this is a holy work, and renders holy, that you believe in Jesus, and then take the fourth commandment and exercise obedience to it; for you hear that your calling is sanctified by the Word of God and is therefore a holy calling.

Thus we should, first of all, have regard to the Word. For he who will merely look upon works, will see no difference between a Christian and a heathen. Both do the works of father and mother, man-servant and maid-servant, master and mistress. Unbelievers and heathens perform them in sin and unbelief, because they know nothing of God’s Word. A Christian however performs his labors in faith and regards them, according to the Word of God, as works of obedience and well pleasing to God. Such works of a Christian are therefore holy, whilst those of the unbeliever are unholy.

According to this example we should diligently hear and take to heart God’s Word; for then we will, like Peter, be convinced that for all our labor we have a sure command of God and will be the more blessed in it, whilst

without the Word of God there is no true blessing, but only a curse, divine displeasure, and an evil conscience. This may suffice concerning the fact related by the Evangelist, that the people pressed upon Him to hear the Word of God, and that Peter has such a high regard for that Word and is obedient to the command of Christ.

Let us now take up the narrative as given in our text. It is divided into two parts. In the first place it contains a lesson and comfort as to temporal affairs, that God will not suffer us to starve. In the second place it teaches us concerning spiritual things, that God will not condemn us on account of our sins, but will graciously accept us. These lessons are very necessary and beneficial, for which reason we should diligently consider and apply them.

The comfort concerning our temporal affairs is contained in the fact, that Christ commanded Peter to let down his net for a draught, which, when obeyed, resulted in catching a great multitude of fishes. The head of a family who could have the Savior near him and his work, would indeed be successful, have plenty of everything, and be in need of nothing. But the Evangelist intimates that such cannot be expected by everyone, but only by those who have been laboring in vain all the night and afterwards have listened to the Word of God; that is, He will bless and help the pious and the poor who have been in great need. Christians must suffer and be tried. But after they have been tried and still cleave to the Word and are faithful in their calling, they shall experience the presence of Christ and His rich blessing.

This is one comfort that is here given, that we should believe. Although at times we suffer want and are in need of many things, we should not get impatient nor give way to despair, but keep on hoping that help will come. This was the case with Peter and his companions. They labor in vain all night and catch nothing. But now comes Christ, our dear Savior, teaches them His Word and makes them Christians. Afterwards He tells them to try it again and to launch out into the deep. Peter is obedient and his labor is rewarded abundantly. The same experience we also shall have. God does not see proper to bestow upon us all fullness at once. For if He would do so as soon as we are baptized or become Christians, we might think that it was on account of our own merit. Therefore for a time He permits us to suffer want and become used to misfortunes that we may despair of our own efforts and say: Who knows what will become of me and how can my wants

be supplied? Then at once our dear Lord will appear and say: Be of good cheer, launch out, do not abandon thy labor, and be sure of a blessing.

When Christians suffer want, it does not be come them, on that account, to despair, get impatient and deny their Savior, but they are to hope that their Lord in due time will provide every thing necessary, and in the meantime to continue their work. For Christ does not provide Peter with fishes in such a way, that they of their own accord leap into his ship. Peter must launch out into the deep and make use of his nets, like the other fishermen, although he has now become a Christian, and must leave it to the Lord whether his effort shall be successful.

These truths we should learn to understand and to apply in our life, whatever may be the calling in which God hath placed us. Whether you are a man-servant or a maid-servant, a master or a mistress, a mayor or a prince, be faithful in your calling; for this will not stand in the way of your faith, and in it you can serve God well and acceptably. At the same time trust in God for your support and the necessaries of life, and be not alarmed if at times you suffer want. The time may come when great success is experienced, as it was experienced by Peter. Only continue faithful in your calling, and do not suffer yourselves to become discouraged or impatient. Those who act differently, at once throwing away the net, when they fail to take anything, and adopting another calling, will never succeed, but remain bunglers all their life and never come to anything.

This is the first lesson, that we should not be discouraged, though we suffer want and do not experience the blessing of God as soon as we hope and desire. It would be unreasonable if God would lift us up at once at our bidding. Labor for a while in vain, like Peter, and say: I also must have my night, and must for a while labor in vain; when the proper time comes my heavenly Father will make a desirable change, according to the saying: *Dat Deus omne bonum, sed non per cornua taurum.* We are commanded to labor, to make some effort, and to wait patiently for success, and God's blessing shall he experienced in due time. But we should also like Peter lend the Savior the ship, that He may enter it and teach and we may diligently hear and learn His Word. Peter is here referred to as setting us a good example; he must have had a pious heart, that he so subdued his natural inclinations and held firmly to the Word of Christ. Here as under many other circumstances the commands and dealings of God seem to our

reason to be all wrong or even foolish. The best time for catching fishes is ordinarily not mid day, but night. Neither is it the custom of fisher men to launch out into the deep, that is, in the midst of the sea, but they remain near the shore, for they well know that here many fish are to be found. This is reversed by the Savior. He tells Peter to launch out into the deep, that is, towards the middle of the sea; and whilst they had been toiling all night and taken nothing, He now asked them to throw out their nets at midday. Peter is aware that such a proceeding is rather singular and not in accordance with his experience, but he answers in a very becoming way: Master, we have toiled all night, and taken nothing; according to our experience there is no hope for us to catch anything now; nevertheless, at Thy Word I will risk it; if that does not affect something extraordinary, all will be in vain.

This was a very fine and becoming answer. Otherwise Peter might have given a curt reply and have said: My good friend, do not teach me how to catch fish; I know it better than you can teach me. To preach and to fish are two different things. Your office is to preach, but mine to fish. I will not teach you to preach, neither should you under take to teach me to catch fish — both would be vain. We perhaps would have given an answer like this. or by nature we want to be wiser than God. Peter however is more pious; he subdues all thoughts like these and resolves at once: No matter how much experience I have as a fisherman, I will not despise the word He has spoken to me, but be obedient. Peter cleaves to the Word with all his heart, in opposition to reason, experience, and everything else.

This is a rare example of Christian faith. It would be well for all to follow in the footsteps of Peter by disregarding their own thoughts and by cleaving to the Word of God alone. Our experience teaches us, that one is pleased if another listens to his directions and observes them, even if by so doing he is disappointed. Again, it is very disagreeable for the head of a family, when he gives directions to his servant, to find the servant disobedient and to hear him say: My good Master, this will never do; I have tried it, but it was useless; therefore I will not do it. A servant like this no one would like to have. Yet our own conduct towards our heavenly Father is exactly like that of such a servant. We are led astray by reason, and do not follow the Word of God as we should. This is obvious in the conduct of the fanatical Sacramentarians. Christ saith: “Take and eat, this is my body; drink ye all of it, this is my blood.” But they say, no; it is not His body and

blood, but a sign of His body and blood: for Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. They judge the Word of Christ by their reason. But they ought to be ashamed of themselves. For such presuming to teach the Lord how to preach is like endeavoring to teach chickens to lay eggs or cows to calve. How would we like it, if our servants would thus act toward us, and would pretend to know every thing better than we ourselves?

God is greatly honored if we submit to His Word as Peter did. Though reason is constantly endeavoring to mislead us, we should not follow, but rather say: Reason or no reason, I have God's Word and command, which alone I will follow. Such a proceeding is well pleasing to God and to the whole host of heaven. Men also are pleased with, such obedience; as when a ruler gives his servant directions, and the servant goes to carry them out at once, without asking whether it will be wise to do so, but concludes: My Lord has given these directions and I will carry them out in God's, name; if my doing will have the desired effect, it will please him and me; if not, the fault is his for giving a foolish command. What is it to me? I am here to obey. If this would be done by us all towards God and His Word, as indeed we are in duty bound, we would have great peace upon earth. There would be no divisions and heresies, but all churches would be united and sound in doctrine. But because the majority of men are not obedient to the Word of God, but are engaged in criticizing and disputing, we have error and contentions.

It is true, we cannot expect to be without temptation. If we have the same experience as Peter, toiling all night in vain, we no doubt feel sorely tried, soon begin to complain, become impatient, and are inclined to give up everything. We should not, however, yield to such temptations, but continue on in our vocation and cast all our cares upon God. For it is often found that the pious and obedient meet nothing but disappointment, whilst the wicked and disobedient enjoy success and prosperity. But this does not last long. A change will set in. Disappointment will at last change into success, and success into disappointment. Hence, do not give way to discouragement, though at first you have nothing but disappointment. For it is better to have adversity when obedient than to have success in disobedience. God will at last bring to naught all disobedience with its success, no matter how great it is, whilst He will prosper the obedient and bestow His blessing.

This we should consider, and follow the good example of Peter, who observes and follows the Word and is firm in his obedience to it, notwithstanding the misgivings concerning it which, no doubt, occurred to him, as they would have occurred to us. God's Word and commands are given to us as well as to St. Peter. By this we are required to labor and to perform the duties of our vocation. Whoever continues to be faithful in his vocation, though he seems for a while to labor in vain, shall at last be prosperous. God cannot do otherwise; He delights in obedience and adds His blessing, though He tarries for a while and proves us in our obedience to His commands. Hence no body should become impatient or discouraged when, like Peter, he has labored in vain. If Peter had enclosed a multitude of fishes by night, he would naturally have concluded that it was owing to his skill and labor, without the assistance of anyone else. But because he toiled all night with out success, whilst now, when he makes another effort according to the direction of Christ he encloses a multitude of fishes, he becomes thoroughly convinced that this is not owing to his toil at all, but to the Word and blessing of God. Let this suffice concerning the first point, as regards our temporal support; that Christ will not suffer His Christians to labor in vain always, but will add His blessing and not let them starve.

The second point refers to spiritual things. Here we learn that Peter was astonished at the great success he now experiences, and that he learns to know Jesus to be more than a common man. But because he learns to know himself to be a poor sinner, he falls down at Jesus' knees, saying: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." This is a spiritual matter which but few understand rightly; it appears as though Peter was so devout and humble that he felt inclined to flee from the Lord Jesus. Such however is not the meaning.

When God offers His grace, forgiveness of sin and eternal life, altogether gratuitously, for Christ's sake, such grace appears so great that we are apt to think it too much for us, and to suppose that we are not permitted to accept it. We readily admit that God is gracious and merciful, but that He will bestow such an abundant measure of divine grace we are not prepared to believe. Many a one argues then: If I were as pious as the Virgin Mary, St. Peter, or St. Paul, I might venture to apply such grace to myself; but I am a sinner and not worthy of mercy, but rather of wrath and dis pleasure. And the devil also is at hand, who makes the sin within the

soul appear to be so great, that we can see nothing but our unworthiness, so that we are alarmed at the high and abundant grace which is offered.

This is a spiritual temptation, which is not understood by rude people, as the most of us are, and which cannot be learned except by experience. Most men go their way without thinking either of their sinfulness or of God's grace. But true Christians feel alarmed at the great grace, and think it too much that God should show such favor. What am I, they ask, that God should be so merciful to me, who am so unworthy?

Here we should notice the comfort and instruction which the Lord so kindly gives Peter, telling him: My dear Peter, I have not come to destroy or punish thee on account of thy sins; "fear not." Thou art a sinner, but be consoled, I will deliver thee from sin and make a great man of thee; be not troubled on my account; there is no danger.

This is written for our comfort. If the thought of our hearts would trouble and discourage us, we should resist and not yield to them. It is not true that Christ hates poor sinners. For their sake He has become man. Therefore His words to Peter are words of comfort. He tells him not to be afraid, as also in another place, Luke 12:32 He says: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Here also the Lord speaks to people who ask like Peter: Is it possible for me to enter heaven, and in company with holy angels live in joy and happiness? I might expect this, if I were pious and holy, but as it is, such expectation is in vain. No, says the Savior; you are afraid, but you should not be. My Father will give you the kingdom and He will do it with great pleasure. And because you are unworthy of it on account of sin, He will do it by grace and without any merit. Therefore do not be alarmed, but accept it readily and thankfully. For if God would not grant us any gift unless we had earned it or were worthy of it, we would never get even bread and water. God does not look at our merit or worthiness, but upon our need and His grace and mercy. It is His pleasure not merely to give us temporal life and subsistence, but also eternal life.

Peter is sorely tried. He is convinced that it is a gift and a blessing of the Lord Jesus when at His command he cast out the net and enclosed a great multitude of fishes. He feels unworthy of such a blessing and is inclined to despair on account of it. What, Lord, he, asks, shall I do in Thy presence?

Go Thou to pious people; “I, alas, am a wicked and sinful man.” But the Lord Jesus comforts Peter and treats him quite otherwise than he had expected. He tells him not to fear, but to be contented, as though He should say, That draught of fishes is a small matter; “from henceforth thou shalt catch men.” Now it is your calling to catch fishes, but I will give you another calling. You shall catch men and increase the inhabitants of heaven, and fill my kingdom, as you now have filled your ships with fishes. For such a draught I will give you a different net, namely, the Gospel. By the Gospel you shall catch God’s elect, who shall be baptized, believe, and have eternal life. And this shall you accomplish not in one place merely, but in the whole world, taking and converting here a city and there an entire nation.

This is the spiritual comfort which the Savior bestows upon His disciples. He will not suffer them to starve, but will install them in a spiritual office and send them out into the world among kings and princes to bring about by the Gospel great changes and commotions. That the devil will grow furious on account of it, matters nothing. Whether he laughs or raves, the Word shall accomplish that whereunto it is sent, and bring forth much fruit. Many shall believe in the Son of God, receive remission of sin, be justified, and become heirs of eternal life.

For this purpose God has given us His Word, Baptism, Absolution and the Sacrament of the Altar. These are His nets by which His children are delivered from the world, whose prince and god is the devil, and by which He preserves them from the devil’s wiles and the world’s tyranny, and strengthens them in faith, so that they may not be condemned with the world.

And although they are not without sin and are weak in faith and consider themselves unworthy of such glorious treasures, yet the Savior comforts them and saith, Luke 12:32: “Be not afraid! do not look at your unworthiness, but listen to my assurance: It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” For if this is the case, then your heavenly Father will not suffer you to be lost, though you have deserved it. Therefore cling to me, take refuge in Baptism, go to the Sacrament of the Altar; permit yourselves to be caught by my Gospel, and all danger is overcome.

Thus, my dear friends, you have here, besides the example showing us that we should gladly hear God's Word, two very important lessons. In the first place, God will permit us, for a while, to suffer want and to labor in vain, but in His own good time He will bestow His blessing and afford all necessary help. In the second place, He will deliver us from sin also and not condemn us. For this reason also He gives us His Word, that we might be comforted and assuredly believe that we are His children.

Those who by the Word have learned to believe that in Jesus Christ they have a kind and merciful God and Father in heaven, who has caught them like fishes by the net of His Word and secured them in it against all danger, also perform truly good works. Even when they are permitted to suffer all manner of evil, they are of good cheer and exclaim: Though I am here exposed to poverty, I am not forsaken, for I know that God will not neglect me. Because He has given me His Son Jesus Christ and salvation in Him. He will not suffer me to want the necessaries of life for my body during the short period of my earthly existence.

God's chief aim is to comfort our hearts and to make us sure, that we may firmly believe, and in no wise doubt, that we have a gracious Father in heaven. Whoever has such faith will not suffer temporal losses to tempt him, neither will he be moved by the wrath of the devil and the world, if only God is gracious and heaven and all the holy angels smile on us.

God grant, through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, that we may firmly believe this, and that in all temporal and spiritual temptations we may thus find comfort. Amen.

Sixth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 5:20—26.

For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come I out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

In this Gospel lesson our dear Lord teaches those who believe, have been baptized, have the name and glory of being called Christians, and have received manifold spiritual gifts and treasures, that they also endeavor to act as Christians toward each other, without being false or hypocritical. God has bestowed on us no false grace, having the mere semblance of grace, but, as our sins also are real and damnable and not imaginary, so is His grace real and sincere. Hence we should not be deceitful, but true and faithful in our dealings with our neighbors, even as God has been true and faithful towards us, notwithstanding our sinfulness.

For this reason the Lord in our Gospel takes up the fifth commandment, and warns us by an example, saying: "I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." This is a short decision: Whosoever wishes to enter heaven must have a better piety than the Pharisees. But what is the piety of the Pharisees? It certainly was not wrong for them to lead a nice, chaste and inoffensive life, and to show a good deportment. For this God requires of us all, as is written: "Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, nor steal, nor lie." It is right for every one to be obedient to these commandments. But the Pharisees did wrong that they prided themselves in such external works, in their discipline and respectability, thought that they were just even before God, and felt encouraged as though they had rendered full obedience to the law, and this could therefore bring no charges against them. They did not remember that God wants not merely good works, but also a new and pure heart.

Against such security the Lord would warn us. Though we were inoffensive and blameless before all men, we should not on that account imagine that we have rendered a full obedience unto God. For Christ here says that though a man does not actually kill with his hand, he may nevertheless be a murderer and a transgressor of this commandment before God; for in this commandment He has not merely forbidden outward murder, but also wrath within the heart, and every angry word and look.

The righteousness of the Pharisees consists merely in outward piety, in abstaining from external murder, adultery and theft; by so doing they suppose that they are pious, holy and without fault, and the law has no more claims on them, but has been fulfilled, and that God, having been satisfied, is no longer angry, though the heart is still full of sins and evil inclinations within. This kind of righteousness, the Savior says, does not belong to heaven, but to hell. God's commandments can not be fulfilled by external works; the heart must be free from all wrath, hatred and envy, from licentiousness and all evil lusts. Whoever can say that he has attained this, may say also that he is pious. But because sins and evil lusts are not overcome altogether within the heart, but exist even if they do not manifest themselves in deeds, you have no right to consider yourselves just or entitled to enter into the kingdom of heaven. For this purpose, Christ says, a

better righteousness is required; the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees does not enable you to enter heaven.

What kind of righteousness is it which “exceeds?” It is the righteousness of those whose work and heart are both pious and in accordance with the Word of God, so that the hand not only does not kill, but the heart is also free from all wrath; so that you not only abstain from adultery in deed, but your heart is also free from all evil lusts and desires. And so in reference to all other commandments; for such the law requires. It does not require merely the works to be good, but it also requires a pure heart in strict accord with the Word of God and the law.

But where is such a heart to be found? you may ask. I do not find it in me, neither do you find it in you. We are very apt to give way to wrath and to be angry before we think of it. And the evil lusts within the heart arise very quick even in saints who fight against them and hate themselves on account of them. What shall we do then? Such a righteousness, that is, a pure heart, we do not have, and yet we have here the conclusion: Except your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

This we shall do: we shall not be like the scribes and Pharisees, considering ourselves pious because of our works; but with all the good we can do humble ourselves before God and say: Dear Lord, I am a poor sinner; be gracious unto me and do not judge me according to my works, but according to Thy grace and mercy, which Thou hast prepared and promised in Christ Jesus.

Our Lord would thus especially admonish us to guard against spiritual pride, and to acknowledge the impurity of our heart and the sinfulness of our nature, that we may be led to trust in His grace. This is the true righteousness which belongs to the kingdom of heaven. This does not consist in works, although a holy and blameless life is required, but in forgiveness of sins and the grace of God. For although we should externally give offence to no one and should exercise ourselves diligently in the will and Word of God, yet our greatest fault remains, that our hearts are still full of evil lusts and sins.

Whoever therefore has been informed by the Word of Christ and believes that his sins have been forgiven for Christ’s sake, is justified; not

for his own sake, because he is a sinner, but for the sake of divine grace, through faith in Christ Jesus, his sins are forgiven. St. Peter therefore says, Acts 15: "God purifies the heart by faith." This purifying, however, is not of such a nature that we feel no more evil thoughts and desires in our hearts. These will continue until we return to dust and arise again to another and an eternal life, when the heart shall be purified indeed. Here it is done in Word and faith, by which God will not impute to us our sins and punish them, but forgive and remit them. And yet faith will produce its fruits and we will begin, by the help of the Holy Ghost, to be obedient to God; but, as before said, such obedience is still imperfect and must always be accompanied by forgiveness of sins. The words of Christ: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven," are not to be taken as though the works of the Pharisees were evil in themselves. When the Pharisee, Luke 18, glorifies himself and says: "I am no extortioner, nor unjust, nor an adulterer; I fast twice in the week and give tithes of all that I possess," he did not lead a wrong life in this respect. It would indeed be desirable that the external conduct of all were like his, for then civil government, the executioner, father and mother, master and mistress would have very little trouble with bad boys and wicked people. But this was the great mistake of the Pharisee that he considered himself righteous on account of his life, and did not think it necessary that God should be gracious unto him and forgive him the sins and evil lusts within his heart. The Lord shows us that we ought not to be satisfied with this kind of righteousness, but to strive for a better one, if we would enter into the kingdom of heaven. For this purpose He holds up to us, as an example, the fifth commandment, that we may learn from it what the righteousness of the Pharisees is, and to avoid it.

The fifth commandment, as you know, says: "Thou shalt not kill." The Pharisees thought that they did enough if they abstained from killing with the hand; that then they had kept this command and were lacking in nothing, and that no one could do any more. But Christ raises a higher standard for them, saying: Not so, my friend; the commandment has a different meaning. If the commandment said, Thy hand shall not kill, then every one would have kept it, who has not killed with his hand. But it says thus, "Thou shalt not kill." That is, thou shalt not injure thy neighbor with thy heart, or mouth, thy senses, or anything which thou art or hast. Thou

shalt not merely abstain from killing the body, but from everything which might serve to destroy life.

From this it is plain that the Lord does not restrict the meaning of the word “to kill” to the idea of taking the life of the body and turning it into a corpse, but includes everything from which, as far as you are concerned, death would result. For instance, if you are at enmity with some one and would begrudge him every crumb of bread, like the rich man in the case of poor Lazarus; such a man, so far as it depends on you, would have to die. You have not killed him with your hand, but you are still his murderer, as Ambrosius says: *Si non pavisti, occidisti*. If you give no food to your brother, you kill him. And 1. John 3. it is written: “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.” The reason is that hatred only awaits a chance, and may easily end in murder.

Whoever therefore wishes to keep this commandment must not merely desist from killing with the hand, but he must also have a heart void of wrath, so that he casts no sour look and speaks no harsh word even to those of whom the world says that they have deserved every calamity. The Lord thus shows that this commandment may be transgressed in a fourfold manner. First by the heart, when it is moved to hatred and envy against the neighbor. Secondly, when the emotions of the heart are manifested and when it shows its wrath by external gestures; as when in passing his neighbor, one is not willing to look at him, to speak to him, to thank him, etc. The word “raca,” here used by the Lord, refers especially to a sour and unfriendly face, in which case wrath is observed in the eye or face and in the manner of speech. The transgression is committed, thirdly, when wrath enters from the heart to the mouth, when one curses, slanders, or speaks evil against his neighbor. The fourth manner of transgression is the grossest and most wicked, when a wrathful heart, unfriendly gestures, angry tongue and hand, are all combined, so that death is inflicted or meant to be inflicted.

Although one degree is always greater than the other, (the Lord Himself pointing out the difference and making a distinction also in the punishments) they are all, the least and the greatest, sins against this commandment. He that fosters within his heart aversion, wrath and envy against his neighbor is already considered a murderer before God. Examine yourself, therefore, whether you have kept this commandment fully, or are

able to do so now, as Christ has commanded it to be kept. If you are no hypocrite you will have to confess that you have not kept it, and that you are altogether unable to keep it. But what is to be done then? How God intends to punish the transgressor Moses has plainly stated, Deut. 27: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to them."

You should therefore do as Christ here teaches, and carefully avoid becoming a scribe or a Pharisee, who consider themselves righteous because they have not committed murder in the external act. Have a care of your heart, your mouth, and your gestures. And when you find that anger is rising, flee to God, saying: O, Lord! I, a poor sinner, have again transgressed the fifth commandment; I have suffered myself to become angry, and have been unfriendly towards my neighbor in words and gestures; but forgive this great sin of mine, and give me grace to amend and to do so no more.

This is one part of your duty, which was not done by the Pharisees; they went on in carnal security and did not consider anger to be a sin, much less ask forgiveness for it.

In the second place, you should make earnest endeavors to check your anger, and though you may not be able to banish it from the heart at once, you should first make an honest confession to God and ask forgiveness, and then guard against letting the anger become rooted, which still may remain in your heart and prevent it from breaking out again in unfriendly gestures, evil words and hostile hands, but quench your wrath and speak kindly to your neighbor. A good word will find a good lodgment; and you shall surely find that wrath will wane from day to day, vanish like smoke.

Such was not the case with the Pharisees. They did not consider it sinful to have wrath within the heart, to show unfriendly gestures, and even to use evil language, but suffered these sins to remain undisturbed. It is the nature of these views, and especially that of anger, to put on a good appearance. We are prone to argue thus: This person has injured me; I would do wrong if I did not look sour and become angry; for I would thus encourage him to go on in his sinful way. I must make the rogue feel it, else he will grow more wild and impudent. As the heart is naturally inclined to wrath, and now the delusion is added, that it is right and beneficial to be angry, we need not be surprised to find a large flame in which the devil figures largely,

the animosity increasing from day to day, and the hearts becoming more and more embittered against each other.

Against this the Lord warns us, that we may not be led astray by such Pharisaical opinions. He wants us to be true Christians, who either do right or acknowledge their wrong and ask God for forgiveness and for a pure heart. If one thus exercised himself in the ten commandments, do you not think that he would have reason every hour to confess his sins, to pray, and to make use of faith and the Word? For confession of sin is necessary when we are overtaken by wrath and other evil lusts, that we may not deny it or excuse ourselves, but confess before God in all sincerity that we have been doing wrong. After that we must pray also that He would not impute to us our sins, but forgive them for Christ's sake, and sanctify us more and more through the Holy Ghost. Such prayer should be offered in faith and in the full assurance that in Christ this and other sins have been forgiven.

If this does not take place, all your offerings and worship are in vain and God has no pleasure in them.

In these words the Lord very strikingly describes the thoughts of the Pharisees; they had endeavored to raise a dust before the eyes of God, so that He should not see the envy and hatred in their hearts against their neighbor, and that other people also should consider them to be pious. But this is vain; you thus merely deceive yourself. God looks first of all at the heart and how it is disposed toward the neighbor. If He finds it to be full of hatred and envy, you have no reason to think that He is pleased with your offerings and worship. Because He has commanded, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," He wants first of all the same obedience from you, or He will have nothing to do with you.

What kind of a transaction would it be if you gave to God an ox which is worth ten dollars and then turned about and killed your brother? That would be giving a farthing and stealing ten thousand pounds. Such work will not pass. If you would serve God, do it with a heart that has no hatred toward your neighbor, – or else know that your service is an abomination in the sight of God.

For this reason many who live at enmity with their neighbors will not partake of the Sacrament. They stagger at the petition: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," fearing that because

they do not forgive they will pronounce judgment on themselves and ask that God shall not forgive them. This is true, and no one should think otherwise; if you will not forgive, neither will God forgive you: this is certain. Therefore consider what you do when you harbor anger and refuse to abandon it. Neither will you make matters better by abstaining from prayer and the Sacrament, but rather worse; for God will judge you as He finds you.

Therefore follow the direction of Christ; humble yourselves before God and confess your sins; be reconciled also with your neighbor and banish all wrath. "Then come and offer thy gift." Otherwise, as you here learn, God will not accept you or be pleased with your offerings, prayers, etc. This is what the Lord means when He says: "Leave thy gift before the altar;" as though He would say: You will not effect anything by it before God.

This in reference to the person who gives occasion for anger and offends his neighbor. He should humble himself not only before God and confess that he has done wrong, but also before his neighbor, then expect forgiveness from God.

The other party who is offended and supposes himself to have good reason to be angry, is also taught by the Lord willingly to forgive and not to continue his enmity. For if you continue to disregard all entreaties for reconciliation, the other party might commit the matter to the judge, to God in heaven, and say: Lord, I have done what is required of me; from Thee I receive grace, which I do not receive from men; I will therefore commit all unto Thee.

If God would thus visit thee, what would be His judgment? He shall seize you who will not forgive nor forget, and "deliver you to the officer and you shall be cast into prison, whence you shall not come out until you have paid the uttermost farthing." That is, there shall be no mercy for you, as is said Luke 6: "With the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

Hence the Lord requires of both parties to be merciful, to give up wrath, and to be friendly toward all men, else the fifth commandment will condemn us as murderers before God, and the punishment shall not be wanting.

This doctrine and practice should be found among Christians, and they should exercise themselves in it, otherwise God will be displeased altogether, and we injure ourselves not merely as it regards life and goods, but also as it regards the soul, as the Lord threatens.

But aside from the estate of Christians or the kingdom of Christ, in the office and courts of the state, the fifth commandment is not thus to be applied. There the Lord has given a special command which is to be followed and observed. Whoever has office in the civil government is commanded to be angry, to punish and to kill, in case the subjects have done anything deserving of death. Father and mother also have been commanded by God not to laugh when children and servants have done evil, but to reprimand and to punish them. This God commands them; if they will not do this, they are disobedient to God, and act contrary to their office and command.

The idea is not that a thief should say to the judge: Do not hang me, for in the fifth commandment it is written: Thou shalt not kill. This he might say to his equals who are not in office. But the government has the command to make use of the sword and to subdue vice.

Thus it could not be allowed a maid-servant, who has been negligent and careless, to say to her mistress: Dear mistress, you are a Christian, think of the fifth commandment, which forbids you to be angry with me; for Christ says: "Whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment." No, my good servant, God has adopted a different rule. You are a servant and are required to fulfill your office and to do with all diligence what you are bidden to do. If you will not do it, your reward will not consist in good words, but in punishment.

This God has enjoined not merely on masters and mistresses, but also on rulers in the civil government. They are not the less Christians because of their anger or of their office and calling. But they would prove themselves not to be Christians if they neglected their calling and failed to exercise discipline in the family and in the state, idly looking on and letting children, domestics and subjects do all kind of mischief.

The difference which is to be made is this: In the kingdom of Christ there should be no wrath, but kindness and love; the heart should not be embittered against anyone; neither should anyone be injured by the mouth

or the hand. But in the state and in the household, the mouth and the hand, according to each one's station and office, shall hurt and harm all who have done evil, or neglect to do what they have been commanded. There it is in place not to be lenient or merciful, but to punish. Whoever neglects to punish causes the highest Judge, God Himself, to arise and to punish the evildoer. In this there is no advantage. For whenever God arises to punish, He punishes the whole nation, one rogue with the other.

This is the doctrine of the Gospel lesson for today. May our dear Lord God help us by His Holy Spirit that we may treat each other as Christians, and that every one may be faithful in his station and office. Amen.

Seventh Sunday After Trinity.

Mark 8:1-9.

In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples unto Him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far. And His disciples answered Him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness? And He asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And He commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and He took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to His disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes: and He blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and He sent them away.

This miracle our Lord Jesus Christ performed twice. In the season of Lent we had occasion to hear that He fed five thousand men, not counting women and children, with five barley loaves and two small fishes, and yet filling twelve baskets with fragments which remained. In the Gospel of today you hear that He fed four thousand people with seven loaves and a few fishes, and leaving seven baskets of fragments.

It appears as though it has been appointed to preach about this miracle at this season, because it is the time of harvest, and people now begin to gather in the produce of the field, so that all by this lesson may be reminded of God's blessing, who is repeating daily the miracle He once performed in the wilderness, when, by little means accompanied by His blessing, He fed

a multitude of people, and so that we may thank Him with all our heart for such benefits and for the fruits of the earth, which He annually bestows upon us and blesses. And although the supply should be small or the produce of the field very limited, we should comfort ourselves, because our support does not depend on the quantity which we possess, but on the blessing of our dear Lord Jesus Christ.

It is the nature of the wicked and unbelieving world, that if they do not have plenty of every thing, they begin to despair, as though they had to starve. God has continued to bless us richly, for many years, and yet many act as though they had to die of starvation. The misers and usurers help along in this direction, refusing to sell their grain and wine for a reasonable price, but wait until they can get more. Those who do not want to recognize such blessings and miracles of God, are no Christians at all, else they would more diligently seek the presence of the Lord Jesus, and trust in His ability and blessing, by which He can cause little means to supply large demands.

Here we have a two-fold comfort; namely, that our dear Lord Jesus will provide the soul with the Word of God and the body with bread. God's people have no reason to doubt His promise to provide for them. He will not suffer them to starve, but will give them the necessaries of life, though they may have to suffer want for a while and be poor and despised, the world being an enemy of theirs and desirous of depriving them of the least crumb of bread.

The Lord dispenses His blessing according to the rule which He has given Matt. 6:33: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." For the Evangelist informs us that the people had been with Christ for three days. And what do you suppose the people were doing or seeking of Him all this time? Undoubtedly nothing else but to hear His Word. This is the reason also why He takes such an interest in their welfare, cares for them, and provides food that they may not perish.

This then we learn to be the most important lesson: First to seek the kingdom and Word of God. After this has been done we may well leave the care for the body to our Lord Jesus. For if we are true students of His Word, He has concluded already to keep us from starvation. Hence He says: "I

have compassion on the multitude.” And if He had no bread, even stones would have to be turned into bread.

Thus also St. Mark, in the sixth chapter, when referring to Christ’s feeding five thousand people in the wilderness, states that Christ departed and went into a desert place. But when the people learned to know this fact, “they ran afoot thither out of all cities and came together unto Him.” And when He saw them, as St. Mark saith, He was moved with compassion; because they were as sheep not having a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.

This was the greatest misery which the Lord beheld, as the good Shepherd and Bishop of souls, that they were scattered like sheep without a shepherd. This was our condition also in popery. The one called upon St. Barbara, the other upon St. Catharine; and no true preacher was to be found to lead upon wholesome pasture, that is, to teach the true doctrine. Everybody moved and lived in idolatry and error.

Thus, St. Mark saith, it also was with the poor people of the Jews. Priests and Levites were appointed to preach about the future Christ and His kingdom of grace. But what did they do? Instead of being shepherds they turned out to be pernicious wolves; they preached their own dreams and suffered the poor sheep to famish; just as it was with us in popery, where no one knew that God is gracious, for Christ’s sake, and always ready to forgive sins, and where no one could tell how he stood with God. Every one thought if he was to be saved at all it had to be accomplished, in part at least, by his own work and life. This is the first great misery which the Lord beholds in the people. He is moved with compassion and teaches them many things, as though He would say: What are those wicked priests and Levites doing? Here is a multitude of people, who are anxious to hear and learn something about God; but there is no one to teach and to lead them; those who are appointed to do it spend their time in pomp and avarice and offerings.

Hence St. Mark says, “They were as sheep, having no shepherd.” Alas, when a sheep has no shepherd, it is a poor and forsaken creature. Even when it has a shepherd, and dogs to watch it and a fold to protect it, there is danger; how much more, if it has no shepherd, no dogs and no fold? Thus also it is with us poor sinners. Those who cheerfully hear the Gospel and

continue in prayer, and besides have faithful teachers and pastors, have enough to do to secure themselves against the attacks of the wolf; must not then Satan have all his own way where the Word and the preaching of the Word is not even heard? Wherever people have not the Word of God in its purity, and no body knows how to pray and how to commend himself unto God, it is easy to persuade them to call upon this or that saint as a Savior, and to lead them all astray among the wolves.

Such misery and great danger the Lord here endeavors to remove, in the first place, by preaching and by calling and gathering through His Word the wandering sheep. We have great reason, therefore, to consider the inestimable benefits of the Lord, and to praise Him for looking with eyes of love and compassion upon the people, and for taking such an interest in them as they stray without a shepherd. Although He had gone into the desert place, as St. Mark saith, for the purpose of resting, yet He has compassion on the multitude because of their spiritual hunger and the starving condition in which He found them, preaches them a long sermon, and first of all feeds and comforts their souls.

This also we find in the Gospel of today, in which the Evangelist tells us that the people had been with the Savior three days, doubtless for the purpose of hearing His teaching. It would have been well if these teachings had been recorded, but the object of the Evangelists was merely to describe the work of the Savior.

This is the first point, that our dear Lord Jesus is very solicitous, and is moved by compassion for the lost souls. He ariseth from prayer to His heavenly Father, takes pity on the poor people, and teaches them. How at the last day will this Savior meet those unfaithful pastors who have been careless in their office, or have even misled those who had been entrusted to their care; or those princes and lords who compel the people to commit idolatry and do not permit the Word to be preached unto them in its purity? But especially, what will our bishops say and how will they justify themselves, who have the name and office of bishops and pastors as of God, but do nothing but knowingly keep the people in idolatry and away from the true knowledge of the Word and true worship; who, on the contrary, punish their subjects bodily and pecuniarily, if they do not yield to such idolatry and refuse to be engaged in it?

And again, what will our fathers and mothers say, who do not, with all diligence, teach their children and servants to go to church and to study the Word of God? Our Lord will undoubtedly say: Masters and mistresses, kings and princes, you have had many souls under your control; it was your duty to train them up in the fear of God and diligently to teach them the Word of God, but you have not done it, you have suffered them to grow up in wickedness and without the fear of God. Of whom shall I demand account for such an unspeakable loss? Of no one but you parents, husbands and wives, kings and princes, to whom I have committed such a trust; but you have neglected to teach your children, servants and subjects. It is not enough for fathers and mothers, princes and lords to secure external peace for their children and subjects and to provide for them bodily; but they should especially see to it that children, servants and subjects be led to a knowledge of the truth; that their souls, first of all, be fed on spiritual food; and that men may fear God, live godly, and be saved.

The highest and most noble work and worship which we can perform here upon earth consists in leading others, and especially those committed to our care, to a true knowledge of God and the holy Gospel. The devil is a great enemy of such good work and opposes it vehemently by sects and persecutions. Besides, it is difficult and requires much anxiety and labor to bring children and young people to such a stage that they embrace the doctrine and become pious.

This service and great charity the Lord performs, first helping those poor people spiritually. It is really sanctifying the Sabbath, and a better service to God and man than if the Lord had given to every one who heard His preaching a thousand pieces of silver. The spiritual food by which man lives forever is far superior to all bodily food.

Such example ought to be imitated by fathers and mothers, masters and mistresses and magistrates. By so doing they might earn heaven, as it were; that is, by saving souls from the tyranny of the devil they would perform a most noble work, very highly pleasing to God.

After this work of spiritual charity was performed, that is, after the Savior had been preaching, which, indeed, is the greatest charity, He begins to attend to the less important, that of feeding the body. For Christ did not come to destroy soul or body, but to save both. Hence it is not right to kill

one's self by fasting and prayer like the Carthusians. Our body is required indeed to labor and to exercise itself, and not to be idle. But we are to labor in such a manner that our bodies remain in good health and suffer no harm. Whoever abuses his body commits suicide, as was done by many of the Papists in cloisters, who injured themselves and caused their premature death by too much praying, fasting, singing, watching, mortifying, reading, unnatural position when lying down, and the like. All such unnecessary self-torture should be avoided as a great sin.

Sirach saith in the 33. chapter: "Fodder, a wand and burdens, are for the ass, and bread, correction and work for a servant." And further on he adds: "But be not excessive toward any, and without discretion do nothing." Our body is mortal, therefore it must have food to preserve health and strength. Further, it must not be idle, but be engaged in labor, else it would become restless and lascivious. And, in the third place, it must be scourged or punished, that it may continue or persevere, and not become careless and indolent. Yet all these things must be kept in proper bounds. Man cannot work always; he also must have rest, without which no one would be enabled to live any length of time. For this reason God has given the day for labor and the night for rest. We also set apart an hour at noon to take our meal. God is no murderer, like the devil, who induces the self-righteous to fast, pray and watch themselves to death. God has no pleasure in such a proceeding. Therefore it is said by the wise man, "be moderate in all things."

This is the second comfort, that we should suit ourselves to the circumstances and first of all inquire after the Word of God. It matters not if this must be done in the wilderness, where we have to suffer want. Our Lord is rich, and ready to provide for our wants and to care for us in a much better way than we could care for ourselves. We can accomplish nothing by our care at any rate. But where God cares there, is abundance, though there be nothing at hand, as we see in our Gospel lesson.

The Apostles also care, but in a different way. They follow the way of human reason, according to which they ask: "From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?" By such a care they accomplish less than nothing. But when Christ careth for the multitude and begins to furnish bread, though there were but seven loaves and a few fishes, there is no lack. Four thousand men, besides women and children, of

whom undoubtedly there was a great number, are satisfied, and seven baskets full remain of the broken meat that was left.

Now if a man were sure that he could live and subsist on a few pieces of silver just as well as a rich man could live and subsist on ten thousand pieces, would he feel uneasy though he had but one piece, and would he esteem the other with his ten thousand richer than himself? And if the one with ten thousand boasted on account of them, could not the former mockingly tell him: Your rejoicing is in vain; though you have a great deal, yet you have no advantage over me, except that you have more to count; your ten thousand pieces of silver do not reach further than the one piece of mine.

How does it come that we, being Christians, or at least claiming to be, do not learn the lesson and act accordingly, neither comforting ourselves with our abundance nor being alarmed when we are in need? For if we make proper and diligent use of the Word of God, we shall not suffer want. Christ cares for us and we shall have the necessaries of life. It matters not whether we have much or little; all depends on His blessing. For if He adds His blessing to the meager supply in your possession, there will be no lack, but on account of such blessing you shall have an abundance, and more will be left than you had in the beginning.

This we should rightly learn, then we would not trouble ourselves even in times of poverty, and would be able also to guard against avarice, which otherwise is continually disturbing us. It is an evil habit to which we are all given, to think those who are rich to be less exposed to danger and to be better provided for. This is the reason why every body desires to be rich, and people at last care nothing for God or man, if only they succeed in their avaricious plans and accumulate great possessions.

Those who will diligently consider this miracle of Christ, will have different thoughts. They will not find their comfort in abundance nor be discouraged when in want. They will rather conclude: Whoever has Christ has a steward who is able to make much out of little, yea, to make all out of nothing. On the other hand, where Christ and His blessings are not present, the greatest possessions vanish and decrease from day to day.

These seven loaves and few fishes were perhaps intended as a meal for the Lord and His disciples. Because the Lord was accustomed at times to

with draw from His friends for prayer and other purposes, the disciples had to provide food for such journeys. But as a great multitude of people having nothing to eat, came unto the Lord, the supply of food had to answer for the whole multitude. As soon as the Lord took the seven loaves, broke them, and gave them unto His disciples to set before the people, they visibly increased in His hands, so that the more He broke and gave the more He had to give. This miracle is performed also for the good of the disciples, who seek His Word, but only when there is need for it. Therefore whoever desires such a blessing must not complain of want and adversity. Hold to the Word and be faithful in your vocation, according to the command of Christ, and let Him care for the supply of your wants.

Never has it been seen or heard that a Christian died for want of bread. They may be persecuted and put into prison, and many of them may have to suffer death; but when they have enjoyed the greatest of gifts and believed the Word, they have always had the necessaries of life. Christians are not to be concerned about having luxurious living like the rich. In the case before us there is but plain living. The Savior provides His guests with a piece of bread and fish and a drink of water, and not with ten different kinds of dishes, and Malmsey and other costly wines, as the rich do who have great abundance.

It is also the will of the Lord that His Christians here below, during the short time of their earthly pilgrimage, should not strive after great riches, but be satisfied with what He sees proper to give them. If we have enough to live on and are well, what more do we want? With that be satisfied. If others have more, let them thank God, and be careful not to abuse their riches to their own injury.

It is evident that the sumptuous living of the rich is not very wholesome in the end, and we should rather choose a piece of bread and a drink of water with good health, than the affluence which is followed by disease and a sickly body. This is generally observed to be the case among the wealthy, who care more for voluptuous living than for the necessaries of life. As a natural consequence many of them fall a prey to all kinds of diseases and die a premature death; whilst the poor, living on scanty means, enjoy good health and a long life. And it serves such voluptuaries right. They should be temperate in eating and drinking, do away with all superfluity, and content themselves with plain and wholesome food to satisfy their wants, and might

thus be cheerful and happy. But instead of doing this, they go on in their accustomed extravagance to the injury of their health, contracting all kinds of diseases and dying a premature death.

Meantime, what becomes of the poor who are in want even of dry bread and whom the rich should not permit to suffer? They would be provided for, if the rich would feel like sparing some of their abundance and were less extravagant in clothing and feasting, in which a great deal is wasted and squandered. Rich people generally follow the footsteps of the rich man, as recorded Luke 16, and do not regret anything spent for splendor and sumptuous living. When they are asked to clothe the poor and in any way to lend them a helping hand, they make excuses or do it very reluctantly. They show a decided unwillingness to do their duty in this respect, as though doing so would be their ruin.

Hence it is perfectly right that God suffers them either to lose all, so that though they were accustomed to cause wine to flow in streams, they are glad to quench their thirst with a drink of water, or, if they do not come to want, to be afflicted with bodily disease and pain more grievous than poverty. The rich have their special plagues and diseases, such as gout, cramps, apoplexy, and the like. Such is their reward for overfeeding themselves and letting poor people suffer want; whilst the poor are rewarded for their suffering by being permitted to enjoy good health and be cheerful, though they have only bread and water. This is demonstrated by the proceeding of the Savior, who presented to the people only the necessary food, consisting in a piece of bread and fish; yet gave them enough to satisfy all and have some over.

Thus our Gospel teaches us to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord and Father, who is desirous to help us in temporal and spiritual things, first giving us His Word and teaching us to know God and to be saved by His grace. Furthermore it teaches us that God will not forsake those who suffer want on account of the Word, but that He will bless their little store and cause it to increase and satisfy all our wants, contrary to all human reason and calculation.

For such teachings we should thank God today, and beseech Him to bestow on us His temporal and spiritual blessing for Christ's sake. Amen.

Eighth Sunday After Trinity.

Mark 7:15—23.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

This text is a part of the long sermon of the Lord on the mount, as St. Matthew describes in chapters 5:6 and 7. This the Lord saw proper to add, because He knew that wherever God builds a church the devil will build a saloon or tavern at the side of it; or, as the nursery story shows, when God formed a beautiful man out of the dust of the earth, the devil wanted to imitate Him, but his work proved to be frogs and snakes. For it has always been the case that when the true doctrine was preached and spread, the devil mixed in false doctrine and heresy. This you may see in a garden: though we sow nothing but good seed, yet tares will grow also, and it requires much labor to subdue the tares and to preserve and raise the good seed.

As then we can expect nothing else on earth than to be subject to the devil, who has the world under his control and is always sowing his tares, our Lord, as the faithful teacher and shepherd of our souls, admonishes us in our text to beware of false prophets.

It is as though He would say: I have given you my Word and have taught you what to do, how to understand the ten commandments, how to trust in God and to call upon Him in prayer, and also how to do good works. Now all depends on your care that ye be not led away from this doctrine. I warn you, and you will have no excuse; for I do not send you among angels, but among wolves, and do not sow you among wheat, but in the midst of tares. Therefore beware, lest you be misled.

It is thus the will of the Lord that we should cleave to the Word and not suffer ourselves to be led astray. Whatever is in opposition to the Word we are to hate and flee from as from the devil himself. For this reason we should never be secure or fall asleep. And as has been said before, wherever the Word is in its purity, wolves will not stay away, but will surely come. This is to be seen first of all in the Church, then also in the civil government and in the family. Everywhere the wolf will interfere and try to lead us away from the Word and do us harm. The Christian Church has the true and pure Word of God; this the devil hates to see, and therefore introduces all kinds of fanatics who bring in new and strange doctrines concerning Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the person of Christ, thereby to confuse and mislead the people. And when such fanatics arise, we wicked and inquisitive people have the bad habit, which sticks to us like the plague, to run after them as soon as we hear their novelties, and fall away from the Word.

Hence such a warning is highly necessary. As though Christ would say: False prophets will not be wanting, but will surely come, and that in a beautiful and enticing guise, so that you will think that you never heard a better sermon in all your life; and the consequence will be that you will fall away like unripe and worm-eaten fruit when the wind sweeps over it. Whose fault will this then be? Not mine, for I warn you; but yours, because you hear and have the Word, but do not adhere to it. For if a Christian were careful, though he had nothing more than the Catechism, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the words of the Lord

concerning Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar, he could thereby defend himself and resist all heresies.

But because we hear the Word so carelessly, with hearts inattentive, that do not adhere to the Word, the devil approaches such hearts and leads them into gross and palpable errors. The Lord would warn us against this, that we might not retain such hearts, but consider how we may take firm hold of the Word of God. For He does not send us among angels but among wolves, where great care is necessary. Whoever therefore would be safe here and not err, Christ says, must adhere to my Word. This is the true light which I have lifted for you, and the armor by which you can resist the darts of the devil, though he does come to you in sheep's clothing.

It is dreadful, and all the more dangerous to us, that when the devil comes to us in his factious spirits, he does not come like a devil, but is disguised as though he were God himself. Thus he also came to our Lord Jesus, when he said: "I will give Thee all the kingdoms of the world, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." These were not words for the devil to speak, but belong to the High Majesty, to the eternal God. God only should be worshiped; to Him alone belong all kingdoms, and He bestows them upon whomsoever He pleases. Therefore the Savior rebukes him, saying: "Get thee hence, Satan." As though He would say: Thou wouldst like to be looked upon as God, but I know thee; thou art the devil.

Therefore we should not suffer ourselves to be deceived by the sheep's clothing; for then we would have to accept and hear the devil in the place of God. He comes to us in his schismatics, fanatics and heretics, not like a wolf, but in sheep's clothing. These will make use of the Word of God, or the Scriptures, speak much to the praise of Christ and the Holy Ghost, pretend to know every thing better than others, and in all this assume a form by which they draw many people and do a great deal of harm. And besides this they lead a strict, externally praiseworthy life, on account of which some might be ready to take an oath that all about them is holiness, and that their intentions are right and good, whilst in fact it is all the miserable devil; as we see in the Anabaptists, Sacramentarians, and others. When therefore the heart is careless and idle and does not give strict heed to the Word, the devil enters by the heresy of such teachers, like a snake into a man sleeping in the grass. Therefore we should diligently heed the faithful warning of Christ and not stand and stare with open mouth at everything new. On the

contrary, we should diligently hear the Word and adhere to it, and examine and judge all doctrines by the Word; then the devil will not so easily do us injury.

The same is experienced in the management of civil government, which is, as it were, an example and picture of the Christian Church. If our magistrates themselves are careless and indolent, not attending to their office and seeing that their laws are enforced, the land will be full of hypocrites. They trust here and trust there, and depend on their officials; but these manage affairs to suit themselves. Meantime the poor are oppressed, and God finally comes with heavy visitations. It will never do for high officers to commit great and important affairs into the hands of others, to trust everybody without seeing to things themselves. They should themselves look into matters and see how the government is managed, and not trust any further than they see, for then they would be far less deceived.

So it is also in the family. When the master and mistress are snoring, leaving everything to the domestics and depending entirely on them, things will go according to the proverb: Confidence rode away with the horse. It is true, we must and should trust; distrustful people, who have confidence in nobody, are an abomination; but we should keep within proper bounds and not trust too much without looking after things ourselves, thus giving domestics occasion to sin.

Domestics too should not be secure, but should diligently observe the command of their employers and not be misled by bad company. For how can it be well if, when father and mother say to the child, or the master and mistress to the servants, Do this, the latter are persuaded by their comrades or companions not to do it, or to do something else, taking a walk, playing, carousing, whilst they should work at home and do what they were bidden? These careless companions may not appear to mean any evil; they speak very kindly; but because they lead to disobedience, they are doing the devil's work. Him you must not follow.

Many a man-servant or maid-servant has a good place with honorable and pious people, who do not tolerate licentiousness and frivolity in their domestics. What does the devil accomplish by wicked tongues? One comes here and another there, saying: Why do you suffer yourself to be confined and kept so strictly? You might have a much better chance somewhere else,

where you would have more liberty, less hard work, and more comfort. A good, simple-hearted person may easily be persuaded by words like these, not suspecting evil intentions, but rather supposing those honeyed tongues to be good friends to him, while in fact they are his worst enemies. For to a young person nothing is more injurious than to let him have his own way and not to urge him to honesty and industry.

Thus the wolf will make his appearance every where and lead away from the Word. For the devil can neither endure the Word in the churches, nor a strict supervision in the state, nor obedience in the family, but seeks to overthrow all that God has ordered as well in the family and the state as in the Church.

It is the will and appointment of God that His Word should be maintained in the Church, good discipline and laws in the state, and strict obedience in the family. But the devil is always at work to destroy such pious, necessary and wholesome order. Therefore we should be very watchful and not feel secure, for we do not live among perfectly sanctified Christians; the largest portion of them is wicked and deceitful, adorning themselves with sheep's clothing and hiding the nature of the wolf.

But this is most frequent and most dangerous in the Church. Here all schismatics, fanatics and heretics pretend to be much concerned about the salvation of souls, and very anxious to retain the Word in its purity and to promote the spread of the truth. When the poor sheep behold this sheep's clothing they imagine that it is all pure gold, grasp for it and embrace it. For who would not like to hear God's Word and know the truth? But Christians should remember that the devil can speak about the truth and praise God's Word just as well as pious Christians. Therefore they should tell him: I love to hear God's Word and the truth, but I will not be too confident; I will inquire first whether it agrees with my Catechism and the doctrine which I have learned. Whoever thus uses all caution, not believing everything, but gives attention to the Word, will be safe and not be deceived. But he that will not do this will most assuredly be misled.

This was the experience of Eve in Paradise. The devil approached her with smooth language and represented God as so good that He could be displeased with nothing. "He has given you the whole garden, says the devil, and permitted you to enjoy its fruit; why should He reserve this one

tree, which will never harm you, but will serve to make you wise as God Himself.” These were smooth and sweet words, acceptance and caused her to forget the command of God; or, if she did not forget it, she doubted it. This caused her ruin. At first, when the devil approached her she acted wisely and warded him off by pointing to the command of God. But when he persisted, and contended that God would be an envious and unfaithful God, who would not suffer them to become as wise as Himself, if He had exempted the one tree, she abandoned the Word, plucked the apple and ate it, by which she and all of us were plunged into all misery and eternal death.

On account of such danger, that we may not be misled by the devil and his apostles, the Lord here warns us, saying: “Beware.” As though He would say: If you are deceived, the fault is not mine, but yours; for I have given you my Word pure and unadulterated, which should be your shield and a light upon your path. Keep this in view, never lose sight of it, follow it closely. If you hear anyone speak aught that does not agree with it, say at once: I will not listen; here is my light, which directs me otherwise.

Thus the Lord has sufficiently protected us by giving us His Word and by admonishing us to beware of false prophets. He bears no blame. But we are without excuse if we do not adhere to the Word, but listen to the noise of the wolf, though we are warned of the danger. The devil is a liar and a murderer, always desirous of misleading and destroying us. This he has done from the beginning in Paradise, leading Adam and Eve and all their descendants into sin, death and the wrath of God. From this misery our merciful God and Father in heaven, through His Son, has delivered us, so that we are free from sin and death. There fore our enemy lurks about, seeking to mislead us and bring from the state of grace into the old wretchedness. Hence we should be careful and faithfully cleave to the Word, else we are lost.

This is to be noted in general concerning our text for simple instruction, inasmuch as the Lord bids us to beware of false prophets and to adhere to the Word, and not to depart from it, but to shun everything in opposition to the Word, as we would the devil himself. This too would be sufficient. For whosoever, as we have heard, follows the light of the Word and does not lose it out of sight, is well secured.

But the Lord is not content to give only these general instructions. He also gives two rules to His Christians, by observing which they are led on in safety. The first is that they do not suffer themselves to be deceived by the sheep's clothing and to form their judgment by it. Wolves, when they are hungry, will bark and howl like dogs in order to deceive man or beast. False prophets do the same. They appear in a beautiful garb, pretend to be very pious, etc. Nobody should pay any regard to this. This is one rule, and it is of very great importance.

The sheep's clothing, in which false spirits dress and adorn themselves, consists in the first place in this, that none of them admits that he deceives the people and preaches heresy. They come using smooth and gentle language, pretending to be prompted by the zeal of God, and to be able no longer to see the misery of the poor people who have been deprived of the truth so long. Language like this common people are not accustomed to hear from wicked men; therefore they yield to it at once and think that what these sneaks say or do is pure holiness. A Christian however should learn to know, as we have stated before, that the devil does not come like the devil, but appears like God Himself. Neither do these wolves come like wolves, but in sheep's clothing, in order that those not knowing them may take them for innocent and pious sheep.

Again, the "sheep's clothing" is the office or calling and the high and glorious titles. Experience teaches that the pope and bishops have done the greatest harm by extolling their office and by urging that on that account their ordinances must be obeyed. Though their life is of such a nature that no one could be enticed or misled by it, yet they have a great influence on account of their public office in the Church. As the Lord says of the scribes and Pharisees, "They sit in Moses' seat." And we cannot deprive them of this honor; we must acknowledge them to hold the office, which is right in itself, if they would only rightly exercise it.

Therefore when the pope and the bishops extol their office and on this account demand obedience, as if they could not err, a Christian should take warning and say: I know the office well, it is a sheep's clothing. But Christ admonishes me not to rest content when I see the sheep's clothing, but that I should examine whether there is not a wolf concealed under it; that is, whether it is not an ungodly knave that exercises the office and that would under such cover introduce false doctrine.

Furthermore, the fact also that false prophets make a good external appearance and lead a blameless life, belongs to the sheep's clothing. This is seen in some of the Anabaptists. They use no profane language; in dress, eating and drinking they are modest; the Word of God they use constantly; they pray much; are patient in tribulation and not revengeful. In itself there is nothing wrong in this; yea, it would be desirable that in this respect all men were like them.

But we must not on that account regard their doctrine as right nor follow them, because Christ says: Beware of them. Beneath the sheep's clothing you will find a wolf. For the Anabaptists, like the monks, rest their hopes upon their own righteousness and works; they make God a liar by not trusting in His promise, inasmuch as they suffer themselves to be baptized again, and thus bring to naught their first and true baptism; they teach false doctrine concerning the Lord's Supper, as though it consisted of mere bread and wine; they lay unnecessary burdens upon Christians; they rend family ties; say it is wrong to hold property, and despise civil government as unchristian; they thus pervert and undermine all three institutions of God; namely, that of the Church, of the state, and of the family. Such a dangerous and disgraceful wolf is hid beneath the beautiful and smooth skin of the saintly external life of the Anabaptists.

The same has been the case with the life of the monks and nuns, who seemed so holy that the whole world was cheated and deceived by them. But God's Word lays such deceit bare and the wolf is discovered in the sheep's clothing.

Great gifts also are used as sheep's clothing, concerning which the Lord here says, "Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name have done many wonderful works?" It is necessary for a Christian to beware of such people, so as not to be captivated by them and without much consideration accept and believe all they say; but, on the contrary, keep in view the Word and see whether there is no wolf under the sheep's clothing.

This is the first rule, that we should beware and not be deceived by the wool on one's back. Though the words are fine, the office right, the external life without offense, and the gifts exhibited great and extraordinary, yet we may be misled and deceived. The good words may contain dangerous

poison, the right office may give occasion for great abuse, the spurious life may be deceitful, and great gifts may cover a wicked heart. Therefore as soon as you see the sheep's clothing you should think, Here I am not safe. For Christ tells me that wolves also appear and hide themselves in sheep's clothing. Hence I must lift the sheep's clothing and see what is under it. How this is done the Savior explains.

He gives us this second rule, that we should not judge by external appearances, but enquire after the fruits. "By their fruits ye shall know them," He tells us. He illustrates this by a parable. No one among you, seeing a thorn or thistle in the field, is foolish enough to go and search whether it does not bear grapes or figs. No, such fruit we expect from a different tree, which is not so prickly or thorny. So it is with the garden. When a tree is full of apples or pears, every one seeing the tree will exclaim: Behold what a good tree that is? Again, when a tree has no fruit, or all is wormy and imperfect, every one will say: The tree deserves to be cut down and thrown into the oven, that room may be made for a better one. This manner of judging, the Lord says, apply also to false prophets; then you will not be deceived, may the appearance be as it will. If a wolf were covered with twenty sheep-skins, you would still detect him and not be deceived by him.

But what is the fruit of a true prophet or preacher, by which it may be known that he is no wolf, but a good sheep? It is not external life, title, office, or special gifts or graces. The Lord testifies and our experience teaches that people are often deceived and misled by these. The true fruit is produced, as the Lord informs us toward the close of our text, "by doing the will of our Father which is in heaven."

We must notice that the Lord is here not speaking of all Christians in general, but of prophets in particular. It is true, all Christians are required to do the will of the Father and to be saved thereby. But to do the will of the Father does not mean to keep the commandments and in this to be obedient to God; for as in this life it is impossible to do this perfectly, we could not boast of having done the will of the Father, and could not therefore enter into heaven; but Christ tells us what it is to do the will of the Father, John 6; "This is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." This is the only way in which both preachers and hearers

should walk, if they desire to be saved. But here the Lord addresses preachers or prophets in particular. Their true and only fruit is nothing else than to proclaim this will of the Father faithfully, and to teach the fact that God is gracious and merciful and does not desire the death of the sinner, but rather that he should live, and that God has manifested such mercy by giving His only begotten Son to become man.

Whoever receives the Son of God and believes in Him, that is, whoever accepts the comfort that God will, for His Son's sake, be gracious unto him, forgive him sins, and give him everlasting salvation, and whoever teaches this doctrine in its purity and leads the people to Christ, the only Mediator between God and man, the same is doing the will of God. And this is the true fruit by which no one can be deceived and misled. If it were possible for the devil to preach this doctrine, it would thereby not become false and erroneous; whoever would believe in it would still have what it promises.

This fruit, which is the most prominent and the surest, and which is infallible, is also accompanied by others, namely, that the life does not contradict this doctrine, but is in harmony with it. But this is to be regarded as a true fruit only when the first fruit, the doctrine of Christ, has appeared. For the doctrine may be all right whilst the life or practice is wrong and offensive. Therefore we must have chief regard, not to the life, but to the doctrine, and we shall be prepared to distinguish a sheep from a wolf coming to us in sheep's clothing.

Whoever therefore would judge the pope and his church should begin with the first fruit, and he will soon find that their doctrine concerning salvation and forgiveness of sins is not based on Christ alone, but also on all kinds of works, such as monastic vows, celebration of the mass, indulgences, and the merits of saints. These are shameful, poisonous and piercing thorns, which are not found on any fig-tree or grape-vine. In the second place, pay attention also to the life. In this respect we see the pope and all his adherents to have withdrawn from all ordinary obedience. They are enemies of the Word and of Christians and persecute, maltreat and kill the latter whenever they can, live in shameful debauchery and idleness, and devour the substance of the Church in their laziness. In short, there is not a particle of good in all their life.

When these two fruits coincide, so that both doctrine and life are evil, you may be sure of having a sharp thorn and thistle, from which you can expect no grape, and no fig; and should you still endeavor to find them, you will not only be disappointed, but be well scratched besides. It does not matter that the vine has such a rough bark and the fig-tree such a tender wood, whilst the thorn has such a smooth bark and such a fragrant and beautiful blossom and flower. The fruit is the main thing, and not the external appearance. Judge by the fruit, and by nothing else.

The punishment of false prophets our Lord points out by the parable of the bad tree, which will be cut down and cast into the fire. And the same fate of false prophets shall be shared by their followers, if they do not accept the true doctrine nor bring forth good fruit.

Therefore let us heed the Word of God and diligently learn it and adhere to it; then let us also order our lives according to that Word, bringing forth good fruit and learning to know and to avoid all false doctrine.

May our Lord Jesus Christ grant this, through His Holy Spirit. Amen

Ninth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 16:1-9.

And He said also unto His disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, A hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, A hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

Our Gospel-lesson treats of good works, and especially warns against avarice, teaching us not to abuse temporal goods, but use them for the support of the poor and the needy, as the Lord plainly says at the close: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," that is, help the poor with your money and goods, for the word "mammon" means riches.

These doctrines the Lord presents in a parable, as He often uses this mode of teaching, which is the more easily understood. He tells us to imitate the example of the unjust steward, who, when he saw that he would lose his office and that he would soon be in need of help, improved the time, as long as he retained his office, to make friends by releasing the debtors of his master of one-half or one-fourth of the claim against them, in order that they might think of these favors afterwards and help him in return. However, the Lord does not want us to do wrong and to take the possessions of our neighbors by fraudulent means in order that we may give alms. By no means. But He wants us to use our temporal goods cautiously and prudently, like the steward, in order that we may reap the fruits of it in another and better world; and to make to ourselves friends of our mammon, as the unjust steward did with his mammon of unrighteousness.

In the first place we should learn here why the Lord calls mammon the “mammon of unrighteousness.” Goods wrongly obtained we should return, and not think of applying them for the good of others or of giving them as alms to the poor; as saith the prophet Isaiah 61:8: “I the Lord love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering.” Therefore, whoever wants to give alms or use his money in the service of God, let him use nothing but what he is entitled to call his own, and what he has acquired with a good conscience. Goods obtained in an illegitimate way from others, we are not to use at all, but to return to the rightful owner.

But how are we to understand the words of Christ, that we should make to ourselves friends with the mammon of unrighteousness, that is, to give alms and to help the poor? Answer: The Lord does not call mammon or temporal goods “unrighteous” because it was acquired by unrighteous means; for such unjust gains should be returned at once; but because no one uses them righteously except true Christians, who live in the fear of God and according to His commandments. All others use mammon for the purpose of living to the flesh, in luxury and feasting, and not to help the poor, which they could easily do. Therefore temporal goods and riches must bear the disgraceful name “mammon of unrighteousness.”

That God is highly displeased with such abuse, we may learn from Ezekiel (16:49): “Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And

they were haughty, and committed abomination before me.” Here is described to us in a few words these who enjoy peace and plenty, so that they do not know what to do with it, and yet will not help the poor and the needy. This is deplorable, and yet it is the practice all over the world. For this reason also our temporal goods have to bear such a disgraceful name as mammon of unrighteousness, damnable money or stolen goods, even though it was obtained by fair means; not as though it were the nature of our earthly goods, of our money, bread, meat, fish, wine, etc., but they become unrighteous on account of the persons who abuse them.

Hence this Gospel lesson warns especially against avarice, and urges us on to make a proper use of the earthly goods which God has bestowed, and thus to make to ourselves friends, so that at last, when we fail, that is, when we leave everything behind in death, they may receive us into everlasting habitations. For our good works, our charity towards the poor, the benefits which we confer, will not merely bear witness to our brotherly and Christian conduct in life, but will also be richly rewarded. One will arise and exclaim: Lord, this Christian provided me, in the time of need, with a garment, a piece of money, a piece of bread, a drink of water, etc. Yea, as Christ saith, Matt. 25: He Himself, the Lord, will arise before His heavenly Father and all angels and saints and acknowledge the service we have rendered Him, thus showing our faith. And these will then be the friends to take us up into everlasting habitations when we fail and depart this life.

Those who would follow these teachings, and use for the help and support of the poor and needy the money and goods with which God has blessed them, would thereby change the unrighteous into a righteous mammon; instead of employing it for a bad purpose they would put it to its intended use. For it will never do for a Christian to use all his money and goods for himself, living in splendor, honor, pleasure and pride; as is seen in the conduct of citizens and peasants, and as the proverb runs of which such misers make use: I am supplied with grain and bread; if you wish to have some too, then see how you get it. That we would call unrighteous grain and bread, and an unrighteous mammon, which they do not employ for the service and the good of their neighbor, but for sinful and wicked purposes and for their own eternal ruin. If, however, those have a mammon of unrighteousness who have nothing to spare for others, especially for the poor; what shall we say of the mammon of those who are not satisfied with

their possessions, but who endeavor to increase them by stealing? This is the case with most of our mechanics, merchants and laborers, who take the advantage of one another and belie and betray each other. They do not make many friends, but many enemies, who will accuse them at the last day before the judgment-seat of God, inasmuch as here they must suffer wrong, keep silence, and even pay honors to such enemies. But at the last day things will be different; there the wronged poor will open their mouth and say: Lord, we had to endure famine, and that man had barns filled with grain and cellars filled with wine, but would not give up one particle of bread nor one drop of wine, except at his own exorbitant price. Or again: That man was my landlord and increased my rent from year to year. Or, from that man I purchased bread, beer, meat and fish, but I and others very seldom got full weight and measure, nor have we been treated equally.

Yea, at the last day all misers, usurers and wicked men will be accused severely, not only by the saints who had to suffer want, and by the Lord Jesus Himself, but by all creatures which have been enjoyed by them or been in their possession, because they abused them to their own eternal misery and condemnation. How do you expect to stand before a judgment like this, ye idolaters and servants of mammon? If those are not left unpunished who do no harm to others by oppressing them or taking advantage of them, but merely do not give to the poor, what will become of those who not only do not give anything, but, thieves, robbers, misers and usurers of the worst kind, as they are, cause suffering and oppress the poor with out scruple, for the sake of getting money and be coming rich?

Such is the Savior's preaching against avarice or covetousness. A Christian is not allowed to open his hand to receive, and to close his hand when asked to give; but he is required to give to the poor with a cheerful and willing heart.

In this way God wants us to serve Him, and promises also to reward such service. On the other hand, the miser and usurer, who are constantly engaged in accumulating riches and give grudgingly or not at all, serve the devil, and from him they will receive their reward.

Especially will all the saints arise in the last day and accuse them, saying: This peasant, citizen, merchant, nobleman, etc., did nothing but scratch and scrape and shave and slave to accumulate riches. We often

stood in need of their help, but they did not assist us with a word, much less with money or goods. The Lord here vividly represents to us how the poor saints will at the last day stand before the Lord Christ and make complaint against the wealthy misers.

The rich, on the other band, who have used their riches for the good of others, will be honored and praised by many friends, yea, by the Lord Jesus Himself for the good they have done. From this we should learn to be pious, gentle, kind, beneficent, etc., thus showing our faith and securing those whom we have benefited as witnesses at the last day, that we have abstained from the vice of craving all for ourselves and caring nothing how others may fare.

Now we read that the Lord commended the unjust steward. This must not be understood as though the Lord wanted us to wrong our fellow men. He only commends the care and prudence of the unjust steward, and would have us exercise in a good cause the earnestness and diligence which he exercised in the bad cause of injuring his master and benefiting himself.

For instance, when a lascivious woman dresses in great splendor in order to succeed well in her sinful and wicked career, the gold, velvet and satin which such a woman wears are not to blame for the abuse to which she puts them. May I not in such a case commend the woman and say: Behold, this woman knows how to accomplish her ends. Why do not you use the same diligence to please your heavenly bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ? By such words I do not commend adultery, but care and diligence and prudence applied to good and honorable objects.

Again, we should take to heart the words of Jesus, when He saith: "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." These words do not need much expounding. We have opportunity every day to see the children of this world sparing no labor and no pains in the pursuit of their advantage. Many are the cares and dangers, to which a roving thief is exposed; he has no rest neither day nor night, and is in constant danger of being hung or decapitated; and yet he likes his devilish trade and can not persuade himself to give it up. A thief, a prostitute, and an adulterer live a hard life, employ all kinds of frauds, spiteful tricks and secret machinations in order to obtain their wicked objects; they find it exceedingly difficult to render the devil the service which he demands.

Children of light, on the other hand, that is, true Christians, are indolent, slothful and careless even in things which they know to be pleasing to God and beneficial to themselves. They find it very hard to do good; according to the old saying, The wicked have to work very hard to get to hell; they serve the devil more diligently by labors and sufferings than Christians serve God and strive for heaven. This saying is very true if rightly understood. God has to compel His children, as it were, to do what is right and needful.

The parable of our text, therefore, is very appropriate. If we want to be Christians and do our duty, it is best not merely to study books, but every one should look to his own house and see how bad children, wicked servants, etc., are intent upon knavery, wantonness and other vices which please the devil. Here you will observe a continued effort to excel in wickedness of every kind. This example in wickedness we should reverse, and be diligent, not in wickedness, but in serving the Lord according to His Word and in laboring for our eternal salvation. Indeed, if a peasant, mechanic, merchant or usurer, wife or servant, can serve the devil so perseveringly, without a murmur or complaint, why should not I also serve with the same diligence my God, whose favor I shall be permitted to enjoy forever? They, like mad men, hurry on in their way to destruction. Why should I be careless and indolent in matters pertaining to my soul's salvation, and wait till I am almost compelled to take an interest in heavenly things? Do I not have reason to be heartily ashamed of myself and of the exceedingly slow progress I am making towards my final and better home, whilst others rush forward in great speed on the road to destruction?

In a certain sense, as the Savior here teaches, the children of this world set a good example to the children of light. Take, for instance, the miser. He has no rest, neither day nor night. All his thoughts and his studies center in money. He turns every nook and corner of his house to account, so as to make it pay. He tries anything and everything to secure, if possible, some profit. In short, he spares no means and no trouble to make money and to increase his possessions.

We ought to learn from his example. As he labors with great zeal for temporal things, so should we labor for heavenly things. But, alas, where do you find a Christian that does this? A usurer is glad when he has a chance to put out his money at high interest. Here everyone is anxious to make a good

investment at ten, twenty or more per cent interest. But where is the Christian who is glad of the chance to help a poor man with ten dollars, more or less, according to need or his own ability?

And yet, we shall be remunerated well for helping the poor, as Solomon saith: "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again." God, indeed, would be our safest and surest debtor, if we only would lend our money to Him. But the devil keeps us from believing that God will pay us interest that will exceed the advanced principal. And it serves us right if in our blindness we prefer the security of man to the security of God, and if in the end we are the losers, losing the mammon of unrighteousness and body and soul besides.

Hence the Lord Jesus very properly concludes that the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. The fact is that the devil always has a hundred servants where the Lord has scarcely one. What can we do to effect a change for the better? Such a change we can not bring about, because the children of this world will take no counsel. But we may teach and continue to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine, that some, if possible, may be delivered from the snares of the devil. We should endeavor also to arouse sleepy Christians, and to urge all to be more diligent in the performance of Christian duty and to persevere in well-doing, as the children of this world persevere in evil-doing. In these our efforts we should continue, because we are the children of light, no matter how difficult it is.

If we are ever mindful of our name, that we are children of light, though we are not as industrious and as wise as the children of this world, there will be no danger. Yet we must do some thing and make a beginning in the work belonging to those who are called the children of light.

No one ought to expect that we shall attain the proficiency of the children of this world in their generation. We ought indeed to excel them by far, because we have the promise of the crown of eternal life, but we encounter too many obstacles in our path. Nevertheless we should endeavor, in good earnest, to increase from day to day in discipline, patience, meekness, gentleness, mercy, and other Christian graces. If only we are on the right road and proceed in the right direction, we will reach the

end, though the progress be ever so slow. But we must carefully guard against supposing that we have already attained perfection.

It is a great comfort to us to know, that if we are engaged in the work of our Master at all, God will not judge us as He will judge the children of this world, who pursue their downward course to hell, but He will assure us of His mercy, saying: You should have served me with more diligence and faithfulness, because you are the children of light; but you have not done it. Therefore I must cover your deficiency with the mantle called grace and forgiveness of sin. This must be spread over us like the canopy of heaven, that we may live under it. Thus we shall have friends in heaven, especially the best of all friends, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who is able to save and bring us to heaven.

This is the lesson of our Gospel, that we should use the mammon of unrighteousness for the purpose of making friends, that is, of serving our fellow men, as the steward made friends with the goods of his master.

But here it is generally asked, how such a doctrine is harmonized with the doctrine of faith? The Papists especially make a great ado about it, and contend that we must earn heaven by works, and that faith alone will not do it, because the Lord here says, "That the friends may receive you into everlasting habitations." The Papists, however, do not deserve a lengthy answer to this and other questions. They would not accept the truth, but continue to mock and to persecute. And yet, for the sake of the honest inquirer, we will here give a short answer.

In the first place, the Papists must admit that the friends here spoken of by Christ are people living among us. Otherwise how could we give them anything? But how can they receive us into the everlasting habitations of heaven when they themselves are not yet there? And yet it must be true that they receive us into heaven; for here are the words of Christ, which must be true and we have no right to doubt them: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

How this is done the Savior Himself teaches Matt. 25. In the last day He will remember the good we have done here on earth unto our brethren as done unto Him, and will give us eternal life, not on account of our deeds, but because it was prepared for us from the beginning.

Here the question is divided. For the true friend who receives us into heaven undoubtedly is Christ. Poor beggars, whom we here assist with a few cents, can not do it, though they may serve us and do us some good by their prayers and supplications.

The question whether we can, as it would seem, purchase heaven by almsgiving, is readily answered. St. Paul saith, Rom. 14: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Therefore it must follow that God hath no pleasure in the alms of the unbeliever, much less will He give heaven and eternal life on account of them. The works of those, however, who believe in Christ, and show their faith by works, are well pleasing to God for the sake of their faith. Such works God will remunerate or reward in the life to come.

But it by no means follows that eternal life is given on account of works. This is promised only to those who believe in Christ, as He Himself often testifies: "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. I am the way, the truth and the life. God gave His Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

This answer is definite and thorough. Here we have the words of the holy Apostle St. Paul: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Therefore if almsgiving is to please God and to be a good work, there must first be faith in Christ. Faith has the promise of eternal life and receives forgiveness of sin; and it is faith that makes all our doings pleasing to God, though in themselves they are faulty and imperfect; He will graciously reward them in the life to come. This is testified to by Christ, Matt. 25, and the Apostle Paul. The sufferings and tribulations of Christians shall be rewarded in the life to come, and they shall have joy on account of them.

The words of Christ: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations," contain a promise that if we are disciples of Christ and perform good works, God will reward these works in the life to come. Good works, however, as the Apostle Paul saith, come from faith. And the Savior saith that it is by faith that we have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. These passages we must believe as well as the words in our text, assured that they are infallibly true.

But how shall we reconcile them? Only in this way that God will grant us forgiveness of sins and eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus; but that

God, on account of such faith, will be pleased with our almsgiving and other good works, and will richly repay and reward them in the life to come; because God wants to urge us by the hope which is laid up for us in heaven to be more cheerful, and faithful in the service of God and in doing good works, as St. Paul saith to the Colossians, 1.

This is the true and literal meaning of our text and the right and thorough answer to the question concerning good works.

May God grant us grace for Christ's sake, and influence our hearts by the Holy Ghost, that these beautiful promises and exhortations may become fruitful in us and that we may order our lives according to them and finally be saved. Amen.

Tenth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 19:41—48.

And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. And He went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves. And He taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy Him, and could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.

This Gospel lesson Christians ought to note carefully that they may learn to fear God. It is one of the dreadful Gospels which St. Luke narrates, which we should take to heart and never forget. For here we are told about the great wrath and severity which came upon the city of Jerusalem. From this we may conclude: Whoever continues in wickedness and sin cannot expect to escape punishment.

Because God did not spare the excellent and highly favored city which, notwithstanding that it had the Word of God, did not amend its ways, all should refrain from sin and repent, else punishment and wrath can not be avoided.

The wrath and calamity which are to come upon the city and the people are so great that Christ Himself is moved by it and weeps because the

beautiful city is to perish and miserably to be destroyed so that one stone will not be left upon another, and He exclaimed: O Jerusalem! if thou knewest and believedst the calamity which is to come upon thee, thou certainly wouldst not be so secure, but wouldst weep and remember what belongs to thy peace, and ask God to be merciful.

Though the Lord here speaks of Jerusalem, yet He warns and threatens all who have the Word of God, but who hear it in vain or despise it, feeling secure or expecting God to be indulgent. Surely the deserved punishment will follow as certain as there is a God. Hence we should guard against every sin, but especially against the sin of despising the Word of God or the time of visitation; that is, of hearing the preaching of the Word without profiting by it, but continuing in sin, notwithstanding all our preaching. The punishment of such sin will surely come, although it be for a time delayed.

In our Gospel lesson a special example of God's dreadful judgment is given on His beloved and most holy city of Jerusalem and His own peculiar people, which city was His own house and home and which people were members of His own family. Jerusalem was like a second heaven, in which God dwelt with His holy angels, the true worship was instituted, almost every prophet lived and found His grace, and finally Christ the Son of God Himself lived, died, was buried, arose again from the dead and poured out His Holy Spirit. This city was indeed overwhelmed, as it were, with holiness, so that the like has not been in the whole world nor will be to the end of time. All this, however, could not save the city, because the inhabitants thereof did not accept nor follow the Word of God, who so strictly adhered to His Word that His beloved city had to be made desolate. How much less will He spare other cities which are nothing compared to Jerusalem, and other nations which are not as near unto Him as the Jews, who are His blood relations.

Therefore we should pay attention to this example of the wrath of God, and guard against despising His Word, so that we may not say, as we are apt to do: Oh, God will not be so angry, nor will He punish so severely. If He destroyed His holy city of Jerusalem, which was His most precious jewel upon earth, leaving no stone upon another, because the people who heard His Word were not benefited by it, we need not expect Him to spare us, if we are guilty of the same transgressions. Jerusalem was swept away entirely, so that we could not say that one house was left standing.

God inflicted this dreadful punishment at a time when the Jewish people had come to Jerusalem in large numbers to celebrate the feast of the Passover, about thirty thousand strangers, as the historians tell us, having assembled there. He intended to kindle a great fire, therefore He had collected so much fuel. When He thus had gathered the people like a large funeral pile, yea, like a forest, He sends the Romans to kindle the fire and to burn them. Josephus tells us that during the time when the city was besieged and conquered, ten hundred thousand were slain or died of the pestilence, and ninety thousand were taken captives. The latter were so despised that thirty of them were bought for a penny. Christ had thus to be avenged who was sold for thirty pieces of silver.

This is the sad and dreadful punishment which God had destined to come upon His people, whom He had in great glory and by many signs and wonders brought out of Egypt into the land of Canaan, Whose Father He had been, and whom He had treated so kindly. But when they despised His Word and would not follow Him, His wrath was kindled and a dreadful punishment had to be inflicted.

Such a calamity the Lord sees to be near, and therefore weeps and says: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." Thou art going on in security as though there were no danger for thee. But it will not last long; things will and must change, though the coming calamity is yet hidden from thine eyes.

We may wonder why God hides the punishment, and why He does not reveal it at once. Answer: He does it to show His patience and to see whether we will not amend our ways and seek His grace. For if He would strike us by thunder and lightning as soon as we had deserved it, none of us would reach the age of seven years. He puts off the time of punishment to give us time and opportunity for repentance. This is worthy of God and He thereby magnifies His mercy toward us. The devil, on the contrary, is an angry spirit and acts differently; if he could kill us by one stroke, he would not hesitate a moment. But God is merciful, and for that reason extends the time of grace, though punishment will come at last.

The long-suffering of God is abused; people will not make use of the time for their improvement, but will grow worse and worse. This is seen in

the case of the adulterer, usurer and thief. Because the deserved punishment does not follow at once, they suppose that there is no danger and that they may go on enjoying themselves. But beware, and be not deceived and misled. For here you see that though God postpones the punishment, it will come at last. Therefore return, repent, and be converted in time. This is meant when Christ says: "But now it is hid from thine eyes." As if He would say: Be not deceived, punishment is only hidden for a while. You may kill me and shed my blood, as you have done in the case of other prophets before me. I am silent and suffer it to be done. This may induce you to think that it will be the case always, and that no punishment will follow. Therefore no one is in earnest in striving after piety and amendment. But beware, you are not safe against punishment. If you could be persuaded and would believe it, you might make efforts to escape punishment. But you do not believe it; therefore you are careless and suffer the time of your visitation, in which you are warned and might obtain grace, to pass by. You continue in sinful security without repentance. This is the very sin for which the wrath of God will overtake you.

Here learn and mark what the Lord considers to be the greatest sin, which He can least tolerate; namely, that His people do not consider the time of their visitation. The Lord here passes over all other sins and points only to this one, that the people did not take notice of the admonition and threatening of the prophets, but even persecuted them and shed much innocent blood, until, as is said in the Scriptures, Jerusalem was saturated with blood, as Germany today has sinned greatly by persecuting the Word and its servants. Besides this sin other sins were in vogue, such as adultery, fornication, usury, avarice, theft, rioting, revelry, and the like.

Such vices, Christ says, I have desired to correct by the Word, teaching you to be pious and to amend your ways. For this purpose I have sent my prophets, John and my apostles; yea, I myself have come and taught, and done many signs and wonders, and everything by which you might have been led to repentance.

All other sins of yours, great and many though they be, would not do you any harm; they would be forgiven and forgotten forever; Jerusalem would be secure and defended against all enemies, if you only had remembered the time of your visitation. I do not come unto you with a sword or with a rod, but in meekness and as a Savior. I preach and cry:

Repent, amend your ways, and be pious. Hear and obey before wrath comes in great power. This is my visitation.

Do not deceive yourselves. You increase all your sin by not acknowledging, accepting or suffering this visitation. In this case it will be according to the saying: There is no help for him who will accept no advice. What devil would shave the sick that would snatch the razor out of his hand and thrust it into his body? This is the way in which you Jews treat your God. By me He offers you forgiveness of sins; He would be your gracious God and forgive and forget all your sins; He only asks that you cease sinning and accept His Word. But you rail against me, say that I have a devil, call my preaching heresy, endeavor to nail me to the cross, and will not rest until you have accomplished your purpose. But this is indeed the Work of the devil that when God not only shows mercy and forgives sins, but bestows great and noble gifts besides, men turn against Him and wickedly blaspheme His grace. When it comes to that I can forbear no longer; punishment must be inflicted. When people oppose even forgiveness and grace, there is neither remedy nor help for them.

This is the principal reason why the wrath of God is so great and terrible. And as the Jews did not want to see nor to hear God's Word, so He afterwards did not want to see nor to hear their crying, praying, and worship. Nor did His wrath cease until Jerusalem was swept away, no stone being left upon another, so that it could be said: Here stood one house, there another. All was destroyed. That is what they wanted. This terrible example the Evangelist has recorded for our profit, that we may not despise the Word of God nor suffer the time of visitation to pass by without fruit.

We should especially notice the Lord's words: "But now it is hid from thine eyes." As a general thing it is supposed that God will never punish. Because out of goodness He defers punishment and waits for repentance, the world thinks that He will keep silent always. But Christ bids us beware; though you do not see the punishment now, you may be sure that it will come at last, unless you repent. Though God delays for a time, yet He has set out so many nets and traps for the wicked, that it is impossible for them to escape.

In addition to this He has appointed father and mother, master and mistress, and commanded them to exercise discipline upon wicked children

and servants. Whoever will not yield to this, He delivers to the civil magistrate to be punished by the sheriff. This is a severe preacher, who has a coarse voice, sufficiently strong to take your head from your shoulders. Then there is the devil, who may by God's permission punish you with pestilence, famine, flood and fire, if you do not repent. No one need think of having his own way and of escaping the final judgment. If you will not repent nor listen to the counsel of God's Word, you will have to be led by the executioner or the devil, but to your own hurt and ruin.

Therefore you should not distinguish between the punishments which are hidden and those which are certain. The punishment of sin is always certain, though it be hidden for the time being. But because it is hidden for a while people suffer themselves to be deceived. Hence Solomon also saith: It does not seem well that punishment is delayed and that God keeps silent so long, as people only become more wanton.

A thief who steals today without being caught, will steal again tomorrow and expect to escape; but he will end on the gallows at last. He will never think of leaving off in time. The same is the case with adulterers, usurers, and in fact with all sinners. The better they succeed in their wicked course, the more eager and persistent they get. They do not regard the truth, that though the punishment is not seen now, it is nevertheless certain. It will always end according to the proverb: The pitcher goes so often to the well, that it comes home broken at last.

Beware therefore and guard against deception. Though the punishment may be hidden, it is nevertheless certain and will surely come. Heathens even have learned from experience and said: When God comes to punish He puts on woolen socks that He may step softly and not be heard. Therefore learn this, and be not secure, though God does not break in at once, but fear and beware. Many angels, servants, plagues, wars, famine and pestilence are at His command to reach you. He may fill the air with fire to burn you. He may drown you in floods or take you away by poison, or even by unsound fruit. In short, the snares and nets which God sets for wicked and impenitent sinners are numbered by the thousands.

This is the reason why our dear Lord Jesus faithfully warns, weeps, and says: Beware, O Jerusalem; because the punishment is hid, you may suppose that it will never come, but in this you are deceived. The

punishment is not bid for the purpose of giving you a chance to escape, but in order that you may be reached with more certainty if you regard not the time of your visitation. If you would make good use of such a delay, abandon your sinful course in time. Adhere to the Word, and you shall find counsel; if you do not, you must perish.

Thus the Apostle Peter teaches, saying 2 Peter 3: “Account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation.” That is, consider it to be your salvation and for your good, that you may not be condemned. For if God would punish as soon as we have sinned, none of us, as we have said, would be come seven years old.

But this He does not do.

He is long-suffering and postpones the punishment. This long-suffering, St. Peter says, account for your salvation, that you may say: O Lord! I also have sinned much and often in one way or the other. The punishment is not inflicted now, but is postponed. What does that mean? Certainly nothing else but that it will come, though now it is hidden. Therefore, dear Father, forgive me; I will repent and be renewed. For this reason we should well notice the words of St. Peter: “Account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation.” And shortly before he says: “The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

If God delays punishment it is done for our good. If we do not repent, however, but continue in sin and abuse the long-suffering of God, then the pitcher will have to break at last. Thus the thief, if he will not quit stealing in time, must at last be given over to the executioner. A lewd woman who will not cease to lead a life of wickedness, will be put to shame at last. God has shown especially in the case of Jerusalem that although He hides the punishment, He will finally come and not let disobedience go free. May every one therefore learn to fear God; and may all, both great and small, old and young, learn to understand that, if they will not cease doing wrong, punishment will overtake them in time. Jerusalem will always serve as an example to warn us. That beautiful city, which was lauded even by heathen historians as the most glorious and renowned in the East, is gone and swept away, because she would not leave off sinning nor listen to God’s Word.

This example the Lord sets before us today in our Gospel, in order that we may take to heart and be benefited by it, learning from it that if we do

not repent and accept the Word in faith, God will not leave us unpunished, though He may delay His judgment for a while for our good, that we may improve the time and repent. If, however, you will not repent, but rather be the more daring and continue in wantonness, you may be sure that, before you think, the evil hour will come in which God will let you cry for help without hearing or answering you.

This the Jews experienced. The siege lasted a short time, from Easter to autumn. During this time they had their sacrifices, their singing and praying every day. But it was all in vain. God had shut His ear, as it were, and would not hear, because He had hid and delayed the punishment in order that they might hear His Word, repent, and know the time of their visitation. But all was in vain with the hardened people. Therefore when God made known the punishment, He hid Himself and did not want to be found. Thus Hosea also threatens the kingdom of Israel, when he says chapter 5: “They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord; but they shall not find Him; He hath withdrawn Himself from them.”

Then let us heed this example diligently and fear God, since His punishment will not be delayed forever. Because He prolongs our time of grace that we may be converted, without being visited by His wrath at once, we should love Him as our merciful Father, saying: Dear Father, Thou wilt not leave sin unpunished, therefore be gracious unto us, and grant unto me Thy Holy Spirit, that I may repent and escape the well deserved punishment. Whoever will thus repent shall enjoy the grace of God.

Jerusalem would be standing today if the Jews had acknowledged their wrong and humbled themselves, saying: O God, we have offended against Thee by our wickedness and by our killing Thy servants the prophets. Now Thou hast given us the holy Gospel by Thy Son Jesus Christ; grant us Thy grace that we may be converted and live holy lives. If they had approached the Lord in this manner, they would have been saved; the Romans, with all their power, would have had to stay at home and leave them in peace. But because they continued in their sin, saying: There is no danger; why should God demolish the city in which He Himself dwells and in which alone He has and will have His worship? If you think this, you are altogether mistaken — hence it came to pass that not one stone was left upon another. And poor, destroyed, desolated Jerusalem stands before us as an example

for all who are willfully wicked and refuse to repent, warning them that they shall suffer similar punishments.

Others who accept the Word of God and repent are comforted and instructed by this history; they learn to understand that when God delays His judgments it is done for their good and for the purpose of graciously forgiving their sins, if they repent and sin no more. It is nothing wonderful that we sin; but God cannot suffer us to defend our sin and continue in it with impenitent and hardened hearts, especially after having graciously visited us with His Word to lead us to repentance.

The poor city of Jerusalem has fallen, and was brought to ruin by nothing else than the great title of being the city of God, His own house or dwelling-place. That rendered the Jews secure, so that they thought it impossible that it should be destroyed. This will never take place, because God thinks too much of it. If the whole world would congregate together, they should not be able to do her any harm; God will never suffer His dwelling-place to be destroyed. In this title and favor they trusted and did not heed any instruction. They thus filled the measure of wickedness and brought about all their misery.

As now God out of special grace is visiting us today with His Word, but both the Papists and we make very bad use of it, the bishops persecuting and we abusing it in avarice, pride and other sins, I am afraid Germany will have to suffer for it whether at the hands of the Turks, or by war, famine, and other calamities. Let us therefore well take to heart this example of Jerusalem's miserable destruction because of their refusing and rejecting the Word of God, in order that we may hear and honor that Word, and that, though we sin in manifold ways, we may repent and amend our lives. This is the first part of the Gospel for today.

Then the Evangelist speaks about Christ's going into the temple, and casting out those that bought and sold therein, saying: "My house is a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves."

This the Lord Jesus does by special authority, and it is to be considered like other miracles, which we cannot imitate. Otherwise those many great and powerful dignitaries who profited by the business in the temple, would have resisted Him and not have yielded to one who stood alone and had no sword, but only a scourge, as the other Evangelists inform us.

The fact that they silently suffered such rebuke and yielded to such power, evidently proves that the Lord had spoken to them a word like that which He spoke to the Jews in the garden of Gethsemane, when they went backward and fell to the ground. We shall never be able to do the same. Nor should anyone explain this narrative as if it implied that ministers have the right to lay hands on the people and to make use of force as Christ does here; for if Christ had applied mere human power He would have accomplished very little against so many.

But we should not look merely at the deed, but also at the reason why it was performed. The reason is expressed in the words of the Lord: My house is a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves. What could have moved the Lord to make use of such severe language? The Jews did not murder or steal in the temple, but carried on the business of buying and selling animals, large and small, as they were needed for sacrifices, and had their money changers. Those living at a distance could not bring with them what they needed for their offerings. For them it was very convenient to find animals for sale by the servants of the high priests and perhaps also money kept on hand; for the temple had its own money as we learn from history.

This arrangement seems to deserve praise in stead of censure; for God Himself had instituted and commanded the worship: how then could it be wrong thus to promote it? But there was a different purpose underlying all. The priests, it is true, pretended to promote the worship by this arrangement, but they would not have cared so much for the worship, if it had not yielded so much profit. They therefore cared more for money than for God.

Actuated by such avarice they could not preach about anything else but sacrificing; such a service they would commend as the monks and priests commend the sacrifice of the mass, as a means by which the forgiveness of sins and the grace of God is obtained. This drew the people together in great numbers so that they were induced to neglect the true worship, which consists in fearing God, in trusting in His goodness, and in adhering to His Word. They continued, in all security, in their sinful practice, and supposed that all would be well, if they only slaughtered and brought sacrifices, as we also learn from the writings of the prophets, who for this reason earnestly preached against their sacrifices.

This is the true sin of “murder,” by which not the body, but the soul is destroyed forever; because people are taught to trust in their own works and not in the goodness and mercy of God. This Christ could not endure. We should not submit to it either, but should oppose it with all our power, but only by the Word, teaching the people to abstain from trusting in their own works and merits, as though they could thereby receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and to put all their trust in the mercy of God, who will forgive their sins, and justify and save them for Jesus’ sake.

Then we should teach the people to be pious, not following their own thoughts, but obeying the Word of God as a rule and guide. Whoever does this will rightly use the temple and his office; whoever does not, abuses his office and is a murderer of souls.

This name is given to the priests in the kingdom of Israel also by Hosea; and it seems as though the Lord had reference to the words of the prophet, who says: “As troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent; for they commit lewdness.” He desires to point out thereby the great evil which is wrought by teaching false doctrine. Instead of pointing to the sacrifice of Christ, the priests pointed to the slaughter of cows and oxen, as though that were sufficient for eternal life. These might have replenished their kitchen, for they always received their share; but the people not only lost their money thereby, but also their souls’ salvation. This the Savior cannot endure, and therefore overthrows their whole concern.

And as the Lord did at that time in a miraculous manner, He still does in the Church by punishing the factions spirits. The day also will come for the wicked bishops, priests and monks, who, out of avarice, extol their mass and idolatry, when God will drive them out and, either by the Turks or others, make an end of their business. This may suffice concerning our Gospel for this time.

May the God of all mercy awaken our hearts to His fear, keep us steadfast in His Word, and by His Holy Spirit preserve us from all temporal and eternal misery, for Jesus’ sake.

Amen.

Eleventh Sunday After Trinity.

Luke 18:9-14

And He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abused; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

In this Gospel lesson our dear Lord Jesus teaches us to be true and humble Christians. By humility alone we are acceptable unto God; no one can please Him nor enjoy His grace unless he walks in humility. This is shown in these two persons, the Pharisee and the publican.

The Pharisee among the Jews held a position like that of the monks in popery; both had their peculiarities in clothing and especial days for fasting and praying, and advanced to such an apparent degree of holiness, that, compared with them, all others appeared as very sinful and wicked. For this reason they were named Pharisees. *Pharisaeus* is a Hebrew word and means a singular person, who keeps aloof from the company of common people, striving to be something extra.

The publicans, on the other hand, held an office something like that of our excisemen or tax collectors. They collected the tax for water-privileges, land-leases, and the like; for which they paid a fixed sum to the Romans,

taking advantage however by oppressing and cheating the people at pleasure. Those who held such an office were looked upon as greedy misers and public sinners, and as a plague to the people. Hence it was not expected that any of them should be pious, as it was not expected that one of the Pharisees should be a rogue.

Our dear Lord Jesus, however, here passes a far different judgment. He pronounces the publican to be godly and righteous, and the Pharisee to be a sinner — a great and shameless sinner. And St. Luke here presents the great contrast. He begins the parable with the words: “There were certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others.”

There were too great faults in the Pharisees. In the first place “they trusted in themselves that they were righteous,” which in itself would have been bad enough, for it is a Satanic sin; and besides this, they “despised others.” What can be done for such a hypocrite, who tortures himself almost to death by fasting and praying, whilst the devil fills his heart to overflowing with pride and vanity, and who therefore boasts of his own works, saying: If I would not strive after holiness myself I might wait long for God to make me holy; but I help myself by much fasting and praying and other good works which are not performed by the Jews. I am faithful in giving my tithes. If others could pay the priests with straw and stubble they would do it; but I would never do so, I am more righteous, etc.

Thus we observe two heinous faults in this apparently pious man: he is exceedingly proud and presumptuous, recognizing nothing good in others, but despising them as robbers, knaves and adulterers. Especially does he describe the publican as a man who rakes, scrapes and steals whenever an opportunity is given. Such a rogue, thank God, I am not; over against him, he asserts, I am a living saint, etc. Such pride and arrogance is a great vice even in the eyes of the children of this world; hence the common proverb: If you are something good, let other people be something also. And how do you suppose God looks upon such conduct? All presumption and pride, over against Him, will have to meet with His great displeasure and vengeance.

In our text our dear Lord Jesus Christ especially describes true righteousness, and also shows how it is to be distinguished and known from false righteousness. As though He said: Point out a man who seems to be a

living saint; he fasts and gives alms, he does not commit adultery, he wrongs no one and delights in going to church. Who Would venture to deny such a man to be godly?

But I say unto you: If you wish to judge him properly, you must not be deceived by outward appearances, which a rogue too may have; but you must learn to understand what it means to be righteous before God. Judging from outward appearances this Pharisee is to be pronounced very good, and it would be desirable, as far as external conduct is concerned, that all men were like him. But this is not enough, and beware of depending upon it and putting your trust in it; for here we see that a devilish pride hides beneath such holiness of life. On account of such pride the devil was expelled from heaven, and Adam and Eve from paradise; how then could such a man be retained in the Church?

It is all right and good in itself to fast, to pray, to give tithes, to keep from adultery, not to rob, to wrong no one. But the Pharisee so befouls all with pride that nothing remains but the dirt of the devil. If in affairs of the world one favors another for the purpose of gain, he does more harm than good; as also the proverb saith: *Nihil carius emitur quam quod denatur*, that is, goods donated are the dearest. How can God be pleased with a holiness of which man boasts before Him? Such a holiness is a double knavery.

This is the case with the hypocrite in our text. O God, he saith, dost Thou observe what a pious man I am? Others are nothing but extortioners, unjust and adulterers, but I am godly, etc. This man with such a pride may do ever so much; he may sweat drops of blood and give himself to be burned, yet before God all his doings are sin and abomination. Christ here says: If you wish to be pious, be so rightly and really, and beware lest you prove purse-proud saints. For if you sometimes stumble or even fall, I shall not be so much displeased as if you had all forms of sanctity, but at the same time were full of pride.

At the close of our text the Savior says: "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Here He teaches us to be humble and to despise no one. Humility consists in thinking little of one's self, but much of others. When one esteems himself and supposes he is learned, beautiful, rich, and pious, he is proud. Such was

the case with the Pharisee; he esteems himself on account of his fasting, paying tithes, and other works. This the Lord prohibits.

The publican, on the other hand, shows no pride, but true humility. He does not boast, but prays God to be merciful. This the Lord desires us to learn. He wants us to confess: I have nothing to boast of. And though I felt inclined to glory in myself — in my learning, riches and power, the Lord might ask me: Whence hast thou derived these gifts? From thyself? By no means. Whence did they come then? They came from me as my gifts. If anyone has reason to glory it is I, the Giver of all.

For thee it is becoming rather to confess: Though I am rich, I know that Thou, O God, canst make me poor in a moment; and though I am learned and wise, Thou canst, by a single word, make me a fool. Such is the language of the humble, who do not glory in themselves nor despise others on account of greater beauty, piety or riches.

Over against the devil it might be well to glory and to say: I have the Word of God, and know that I have made use of it for the good of others in teaching, comforting and admonishing them; and again I have done good to others by almsgiving, which I know to be good works, in spite of all the slandering of the devil. But over against God, who is the Giver of all, we have no reason to glory, but should be humble.

Neither should we despise our neighbors. Every good gift belongs to God and comes from Him. And although I should have received more of them than my neighbor, I know at the same time that God judges righteously, and that my neighbors, having received perhaps only the tenth part of the gifts which I have received, may on account of one virtue be far more acceptable unto God than I. Why then should I glory in anything of myself or exalt myself? If I have much, I should be afraid of misusing it. At all times I should remember that God deals according to His good pleasure, giving little to one and much to another. And yet it may be the case that the one receiving but little is favored most; because those having much must give account for more, whilst those having but little incur the less danger.

Such however is not the opinion of the Pharisee; he plainly shows his spirit. I am not as other men are, or even as this publican. I give tithes of all that I possess; the publican does nothing but steal. I wrong no one, but he cheats and flays all who come in contact with him. In short, the Pharisee

imagines that he is everything and has everything, whilst he considers the publican to be nothing and to have nothing. What consummate wickedness! He should rather have said: It is true, I give my tithes regularly; I fast and do other good works as much as I can; yet I cannot trust in all my doing. All I have and do is a merciful gift of Thine, O God, and this publican may be more pleasing in Thy sight than I. Thus the Pharisee should have placed the publican above himself, or at least on an equality with himself. He should have said: It does not depend on gifts, either many or few, but on a gracious God. Why should I boast and despise others; when everything depends on the mercy of God and not on the gifts which we may possess? But such is not his language. He rather boasts of his piety, and that at a time when he is standing before God and praying.

Thus the Lord forbids us to boast on account of our piety. He also teaches that no one has any reason to despair on account of sin, into which he has been misled by the devil. We have one God who embraces and covers us all with the mantle of His mercy — the pious and the sinner, the learned and the ignorant, the rich and the poor — He is the God of us all. Hence we should not exalt ourselves, but be humble, and should not imagine that we are better than others because we are rich, whilst they are poor. For God may favor the poor rather than the rich; yea, He can take away riches and reduce to nakedness, and again cover the naked beautifully and bestow excellent gifts. Why then should we exalt ourselves and despise others?

In this world there will always be such a difference in regard to person, standing and gifts, so that the one will be more highly esteemed than the other. Yet on that account we are not unequal before God. And because nothing is recognized before Him except grace, why should anyone be permitted to boast and to be proud? All should humbly recognize the fact that God is the same, notwithstanding the difference in us; He has the same eye upon the poor as upon the rich. Therefore all should learn to trust in God's mercy and grace. Both the righteous and the sinner, the rich and the poor, the strong and the feeble, are in the hands of God. Whatever they possess, they have received from Him. Of themselves they have nothing but sin. Hence no one should exalt himself over others, but all should fear God and be humble. For everything good is a gift of God. God has reason to claim the credit, not we. For us it is becoming to make use of His gifts with

thanksgiving and in the fear of God. He will not suffer us to be proud, presumptuous and boastful.

But whilst God forbids all pride on account of piety and other gifts, He does not, at the same time, want us to despair on account of our sinfulness. He rather wants us, in this case, to trust in His mercy and to say: Though I am not as plentifully supplied as others, yet their God is my God and He has promised to be merciful to me also. Hence I will be contented and be faithful in my office or vocation, according to the gifts which He has bestowed; I will despise no one, nor exalt myself, neither will I feel slighted if others are favored more than I. I am well satisfied that the God of others is my God also, who is always the same, notwithstanding the difference in men.

It is this to which our Lord refers in the closing words of our parable when He says: "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." As though He would say: If I meet a saint, who wants to be nothing in himself, but in deep humility depends on me alone, I will exalt and enrich him without measure; but those who exalt themselves on account of gifts in their possession, shall be deprived of them one after the other, until they are cast out in disgrace into the bottomless pit of hell.

If the Pharisee had not been so proud, but in all humility had been thankful, saying: O Lord, Thou hast been merciful unto me and graciously preserved me from many sins; I thank Thee for these gifts, of which I am unworthy; but I do not exalt myself on account of them, neither do I on that account despise others; it is all Thine, Thou hast given and Thou canst take away, — if such had been his sentiment and language, God might have given him still more, from day to day, and would not have been displeased with him. But because he is proud on account of his gifts and judges and despises others, saying: I am all and the publican is nothing, therefore God deprives him of all, leaving him nothing of which to glory. This is expressed in the sentence pronounced by the Savior: "The publican went down to his house justified rather than the other." That is, the Pharisee is unrighteous and condemned, and belongs to the devil in hell. What good does all his boasting do him? But the publican who prays: "God be merciful to me a sinner," is pronounced a saint of the Church, and enjoys the mercy for which he prayed.

The Savior here teaches us all to understand better every day what we are and have, saying: If you have money, health, and other possessions, make good use of them; I do not bestow them grudgingly; I delight in giving and will give still more; but do not exalt yourself, nor despise others on account of it. Remember that those who have less than you can have the same gracious God as you. Therefore do not despise them; let them be your equals, and God shall be praised by you all. The false saints do not honor God, but dishonor Him, though they may net do it in word or in public.

If we would judge the words merely we could not call it wrong in the Pharisee to say: “God, I thank Thee!” Such words are used also by true saints in their prayers, but in their case they come from a different heart. When they thank God for anything, they acknowledge at the same time that all they have is not of themselves, but is a work and gift of God. Such was not the conviction of the Pharisee, else he would have said: The reason that I am no adulterer, no extortioner and no unjust man is not to be found in me, but in Thee; Thou alone art deserving of the praise. If I had been left alone, and without the help of divine grace, I would have acted like other men. We are all alike, and no one is entitled to exalt himself above others.

Such however is not the language of the Pharisee. On the contrary, he says: “I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are.” He ascribes everything good which he possesses to himself, as if it came from him, and not from God; else he would have said: Thou hast given it. But this he does not do. In his imagination he is rich in himself and able to give unto God. In reality he does not thank God, but himself — his wisdom, his own will and powers — that he is able to accomplish so much.

It is true, if God pours a rich measure of precious gifts upon individuals, it becomes them to acknowledge and appreciate such favors. For what would we think of a person claiming to have no more learning and to be no better than an ass, or any other irrational creature? One who has received of God money and goods should not be unreasonable and pretend to be poor and a beggar. So also if one has done a good work by giving and assisting others, it would not be right for him to say: I have done no good work. By no means. God’s gifts we should recognize, praise and esteem.

But we have reason to humble ourselves and to say: O God, the gifts which I enjoy are not mine, but Thine; Thou hast given them, else I would

be deprived of them like others. All praise is due unto Thee! Every one should thus humble himself before God. His gifts we should not consider small and insignificant, but great and glorious. Yet we should not exalt ourselves on account of them; but, as we have stated repeatedly, ascribe all praise to God and say: It is Thy gift, O God; Thou hast bestowed it upon me. If others are without it, that matters not, for they have the same gracious God notwithstanding, why should I despise them?

In our text the Lord wants to teach us humility and to warn us against pride and vanity. It is here written: "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased." God has not spared His own chosen people, but has given them over to destruction, because of their pride. Other nations for the same cause have shared the same fate. Pride also was the reason why Lucifer was expelled from heaven, and Adam and Eve from Paradise.

Therefore learn to address the Lord, saying: All I have is Thine; Thou hast given it, and it is in Thy power also to take it away again. Thus pride is subdued; for who would be foolish enough to boast of uncertainties? Those who think differently and suppose that they have all from themselves, may here read their sentence, according to which God will deprive them of everything and pronounce them unjust and the devil's own.

God grant that we may take to heart these teachings and live according to them.

Amen.

Twelfth Sunday After Trinity.

Mark 7:31-37.

And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, He came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring unto Him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech Him to put His hand upon him. And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers into his ears, and He spit and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, He sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And He charged them that they should tell no man; but the more He charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it; and were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well; He maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak."

This is a simple Gospel and easily understood, because it merely describes the miracle which the Lord performed on a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech. Concerning such miracles you have occasion to hear often during the year that Christ shows by them that He is the Savior, who is willing to help us against the wrath of the devil. And we have especial reason to thank God for having sent us one who out of great mercy will assist us against all which the devil can do against us.

The fact that the man here spoken of was so injured that he could neither hear nor speak like other men, shows us that he had been afflicted by the devil. Before the world it might have the appearance and every one may think that such infirmities are natural; because they do not know the devil, that he causes various injuries, making people wild and foolish and abusing them in every way possible, not only in regard to the body, but also the

soul, so that one may die from the effects of anguish and sadness, not being able to have a moment of joy. We Christians should have it understood that such ailments and infirmities are nothing else than the blows of the devil, who causes all kinds of misery upon earth, and is doing mischief wherever he can.

Hence we have reason to thank our dear heavenly Father that He has taken pity on us in our misery, and has sent His Son Jesus Christ our Lord to help this poor man, and to preserve us from plagues of this kind, by which our enemy tries to injure us. For every one who has sound eyes, ears, hands, feet, and other members, should remember that they are not so by nature or by chance, as the world seems to think, but that they are gracious gifts of God. But because the world does not believe this, considering such gifts common and natural things, therefore God sometimes permits the devil to make one deaf and dumb and another blind, or even to kill him, in order that everybody may see that God has given permission to the devil thus to do, and be encouraged diligently to thank God for having preserved us from such troubles.

So it is the work of the devil also to blindfold the people by erroneous and false doctrine, so that they are not able to perceive and accept the truth. All the works of God are good, for He Himself is good and can do nothing but what is good. The devil, on the contrary, is evil; therefore whenever God permits him he will do mischief. A tree may bear good and beautiful apples, but when insects come and sting the fruit, it will necessarily become wormy and spoiled. Such is not the fault of God, who has made the tree good, neither is it the fault of the tree or the fruit, but of the worms and insects.

This is the case also with us. God is a God of life; therefore He gives a sound body and sound and useful members. But whenever the devil is permitted to do so, he will injure the body and do a great deal of harm. Therefore we should learn to understand, when we are attacked by such maladies, that they are darts of the devil, who is a bitter enemy of all men, especially of Christians, and that he is envious of all good.

It is indeed terrible that this wicked and powerful enemy should cause so much misery. Against all this we are comforted by our text which recommends to us the sure help against such enemy. St. John tells us 1 John

3: “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” The devil entered Paradise to destroy the work of God and to change the holy and pious persons, Adam and Eve, into disobedient and wicked persons. This God could not endure, but thought of taking revenge upon His enemy. Therefore He restores that which was destroyed by Satan; He also destroys the work of the devil, such as sin, death and hell. This we see also in the text, according to which He loosens the tongue which the devil had tied and opens the ear which he had closed. Christ came to perform this work, and carries it out among His Christians, as you will learn further on. This may suffice about the miracle and work of our Lord Jesus, in which He has manifested Himself today, according to which He is the help for all suffering people. and is willing to heal all maladies inflicted by the devil and to defend us against him.

The Lord also wants to teach us by this miracle that two things especially belong to a Christian; namely, that his ears must be opened and his tongue be loosed, and that He Himself will perform this work daily in His Church, in opposition to the devil. The bodily blessing of sound ears and tongue He also bestows upon the heathens, whilst the spiritual blessing of opening the ears and loosing the tongue is bestowed only upon Christians. For it is certain that we have our salvation by the Word of God alone. What would we know about God, about the Lord Jesus and His sacrifice, and about the Holy Ghost, without that Word? The greatest miracle and blessing even to day is enjoyed when God gives us ears which like to hear His Word, and tongues which do not blaspheme, but honor God.

Our opponents, the Papists, are a thousand times more miserable than the dumb person in our text. Their ears are altogether deaf. And though they hear the Word of God, yet they can not and will not hear it, just as we observe this in the unbelieving Jews. When our Lord Jesus preached unto them the most beautiful sermons about forgiveness of sins and eternal life, they became foolish and enraged, and did not merely refuse to bear, but began even to blaspheme. This is the case with all who do not want to hear the Word of God; they are deaf and dumb, and more miserable than the man spoken of in our text. They seem to have no other use for their tongues than to blaspheme God and to revile His Word, which is the highest treasure, whilst those who love to hear the Word of God and to whom the Savior repeats the words spoken to the deaf and dumb: “Ephphatha, that is, be

opened,” are really delivered from the devil. For God has given us no other way upon which we might go to heaven, except His blessed Word, the holy Gospel. Whoever loves to hear it, pays strict attention to it, and finds his delight in it, receives deliverance. This is a miracle which is performed in the Church daily, that our ears, which the devil had closed by sin, are opened again by the Word, so that we may hear the Word of God.

The other work of the Lord is that He teaches our tongues and causes us to speak aright, as St. Paul says, Rom. 10: “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” By faith in Christ Jesus we obtain forgiveness of sins. Then We are not dumb, but make confession, speaking as we believe. This makes a Christian, which is not done by any other work.

It may be that a monk fasts, watches and does violence to his body more than a Christian, but by so doing he can not become a Christian; he is still deaf and dumb. He will not hear the Word, much less will he confess it. A Christian, however, will hear, believe, and confess it. These two things make a Christian. Our dear Lord Jesus Christ thus still performs such work or miracle in the Church every day by His Spirit and Word, which work He then performed on the body of the deaf and dumb in order to prove that He could and would deliver us from all infirmities caused by the devil, and especially from spiritual infirmities, to the end that we might believe in Him and base all our hopes upon Him.

Now we should also learn to understand the meaning of the ceremonies which Christ here employs. The people bring the poor man, beseeching Him to put His hand upon him. He at once “took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers into his ears, and He spit, and touched his tongue.” Afterwards “looking up to heaven, he sighed and said unto him, Ephphatha, that is, be opened.” Our Lord’s action in performing this miracle is indeed peculiar. As we have heard what it is to be deaf and dumb, we have to see also why the Lord employed peculiar ceremonies in performing this miracle, which He might have accomplished by a single word. For we see in the Gospel from beginning to end that all He needs to use is a word; whatever He wills, is done.

The Lord here employs so much ceremony for the sake of the spiritual miracles. He would thereby show how much is required to make the deaf to

hear and the dumb to speak. Lazarus He raised from the dead by a word. To the man sick of the palsy He said: "Arise and walk," and he was well at once. But in the case of this person who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, He does not perform the miracle at once and by a word, but proceeds slowly and with many ceremonies. He put His finger into his ears, spit and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven He sighed and said finally, "Be opened." All this He does in order to teach us how we may be delivered from the bondage of the devil, and how our ears may be opened and our tongues be loosed, namely, by the external word or the office of the ministry, and by external signs. First of all we must hear the Word and afterwards not neglect the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; for then the Holy Spirit will employ these means and restore both the ears and the tongue.

Let every one therefore beware of the errorists who despise the external Word and Sacrament and wait for God to speak in their hearts. No, says Christ, here is my finger, the external Word, which must sound in the ear. Here is my spittle, which must touch and moisten the tongue. By this only my work will be done and prosper. Wherever the external Word is rightly employed, we surely find Christians; wherever it is not rightly used, we find none. For as is the shepherd, so are the sheep. Let every one therefore pursue this way and love to hear the Word. For God will not manifest Himself in your heart without the Word. If you are to see and know Him at all, it must be done by the Word and the Sacraments only; apart from these means the Holy Ghost will accomplish nothing in your behalf. Thus God has declared from heaven, saying: "This is my beloved Son, Him ye shall hear." And again, He commands His disciples, saying: "Go ye into all the world and teach and baptize all nations." And again: "He that heareth you, heareth me." In these words our dear Lord Jesus has commanded us to preach the Gospel and to baptize. This is the true way to be saved, all others are vain and useless. "He that heareth you," says He, "heareth me."

Besides the ministry of the Gospel God has also appointed father and mother, master and mistress in the family, and the civil authorities in the state. This office they held, not on their own account, but in the place of God Himself. You therefore ought to hear them in all things pertaining to external life and all your conduct towards others, being assured that when you hear them you hear God Himself, except when they abuse their office

and command and require anything contrary to the Word; in this case you must not hear them. For we must obey God rather than men. First, as we have said, you are to hear God in the Church by His servants, then father and mother and civil magistrates; whatever they tell you officially, God Himself tells you. Therefore hear and obey.

If God would Himself preach in a church, though it were at a distance of a hundred miles, all would want to go there to hear the voice of God. But our Lord God says: I will make it more convenient for you; you do not need to go so far; only hear your pastor, your father and mother, and you hear me; for they are my disciples and officials. Whenever you hear them, I will speak unto your souls as I spoke to the deaf man, saying: "Hephphatha," and your ears shall be opened and your tongue loosed, and you shall at once be a hearing and speaking man, and no longer deaf and dumb as before.

But how do we find it? Parents and superiors may preach and teach what they please, the children and domestics will not listen, nor do any thing that is required unless they are compelled. Thus a civil government also may require what it pleases, scarcely one in a hundred will sincerely seek to comply with the command. This is the case especially now, when, on account of the great danger which is threatening Germany, the need is great that we should repent and be pious, adhere to God's Word and avoid giving offence, to which Christian governments faithfully admonish. This however is very hard to accomplish. It appears as though the world were intentionally becoming more wicked than it was before we had the Word.

As in the family and in civil government, so also is it in the Church. There are very few who in sincerity listen to the preaching of the Gospel and open their ears as they should. Most of men, in cities and in the country, are enemies of the servants of the Church, and if they could do them great harm, give them nothing, but take away from them, they would gladly do it, as we, alas, observe everywhere. And because God, who speaks through father and mother, the civil government and the servants of the Church, is not heard, it will follow as a punishment that the devil will more and more close the ear and bind and make heavy the tongue, so that God's Word is not heard nor talked about. On the other hand, the devil opens the ears. so that his lies, heresies, false doctrines, licentiousness, and such like, are heard gladly, and unbinds the tongue, so that God is blasphemed and every person is offended. When the Word of God is despised such reward usually

follows; and people get no more than their due, because they desire to have it thus. Besides this, temporal plagues also will follow, such as pestilence, war, the Turks, and other calamities, by which wicked people are punished as they have deserved, as we already have occasion to see. May God help us to repent and to become more pious.

This is the reason why the Lord looks up to heaven, sighs and says, deeply moved: “Ephphatha, that is, be opened.” It grieves Him that people do not want to be helped, that they are hastening into their own destruction, and that they compel God to punish them, although He would like to help them and to deliver them from the bondage of the devil by His Word.

Let us therefore take to heart this miracle, and follow the example of those who praised the Lord Jesus, saying: “He hath done all things well; He maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.” This He continues to do, as we have said, in His Church by His “finger and spittle,” that is, by the external Word which is preached at His command, and by which the ear of the deaf are opened and the tongues of the dumb are made to speak. By these means, and by nothing else, does the Holy Ghost accomplish His work in us. Then mark this, and pay the greater attention to this Word. This is the nearest and surest way to have your ears opened and your tongue loosed, and to be saved.

May our dear Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, grant it.

Amen.

Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity.

Luke 10:23-37.

And He turned Him unto His disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them. And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted Him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. And He said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

This is a somewhat lengthy text: therefore we will take up but one or two points, that we may the better heed them and profit by them. The first point we notice is, that the Savior here lauds His precious Gospel, saying to His disciples: “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see. For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear and have not heard them.”

In these words the Savior wishes to comfort us when we see that the precious Gospel is despised more than anything else in this world. For it is a fact that the wicked world can hear and suffer all false doctrine, lies of the devil, and all heresy rather than the Gospel, which it will neither hear nor see, but continues to revile and to persecute vehemently, and thus to cause great sorrow to those who preach it. Such deplorable examples we observe all over Germany and many other countries. This the Lord observes, and comforts His disciples, saying: The children of this world, yea, even my own people, to whom I have been promised and sent, all deride and blaspheme my Word. But he that is so favored as to have this Word and uses it for his comfort, is indeed blessed and has blessed ears. He has reason to thank God from all his heart that he possesses and is able to appreciate what the children of this world so much despise. You are indeed more blessed than Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah — yea more than David and other pious kings. The highest desire of all sainted patriarchs, prophets and kings was for the time when they should see and hear me. This time they have not reached; but you have been blessed to see it. Therefore rejoice and be comforted, and thank God with all your hearts for the inestimable blessing of seeing and hearing me. You are indeed blessed above all others.

The Lord knows what poor and miserable creatures we are. When we have not the treasure of the precious Gospel, one error follows another, so that no one could be saved. This we have experienced everywhere in popery. There we had suffered the devil to be our preacher, and submitted to all that he taught and lied through boisterous and false prophets about the mass, pilgrimages, purgatory and other invented fables. And we cannot expect anything else; wherever the Word of God is not observed, there all manner of error and lies are accepted and believed. And the worst of it is

that men of this kind imagine that they are on the way of salvation, whilst in fact they are hurrying on to hell and the devil.

But again, after having the Gospel, things look even more deplorable, because most of men despise it and a few only receive it for their good. Hence we are, at best, poor and miserable people. If God withholds His Word, we are deprived of our soul's salvation; if He offers it, no one has a desire for it. Would it not be best then, that God would hasten the day of judgment and at once destroy all? For the unbelieving world is moved neither by grace nor by punishment. And yet it is written: "Blessed are the ears that hear and receive;" they shall be permitted to reap eternal joy and salvation.

This is the first point, that our dear Lord Jesus complains of the Jews, God's people, to whom He had been promised and to whom He offered, in His Word, forgiveness of sins and life and salvation, but who continued to reject all. Hence the Savior turned to His disciples and said privately: "Blessed are ye," who have and hear the Word of God, and have not departed this life before the Word of God came. For I tell you, the greatest and most renowned prophets and kings desired to live and to see it, without having their desire fulfilled. Most of the people in this world are so wicked as not to inquire after the Word of God, but even to reject it and to blaspheme. Do not suffer this to offend you, but improve the time of grace for your deliverance. The Lord is very anxious that every one should hear the Word in faith and not despise it. But we see among all classes of people, from the highest to the lowest, that those who are not able to persecute the Gospel are engaged in despising it; and a very few only receive it thankfully and profit by it. And these few are the ones whose ears and eyes are called blessed.

The second point is that the Lord refers us to the fruit of the Gospel, to the good works which follow from hearing God's Word aright. This He paints in glorious colors in the excellent example of a man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. By chance there came down a certain priest that way, but when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Next comes a Levite; he too sees him, but leaves him and passes by on the other side. At last came a certain Samaritan, a heathen of whom nothing good was expected, being a stranger who did not belong

to the Jews and was not specially indebted to the poor sufferer like the priest and the Levite. But he beholds the poor sufferer and has compassion on him. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn. And when, on account of business, he had to depart, he commends him to the host, gives him two pence, and asks him to take care of him until he shall return.

But before we proceed to speak further of the blessed fruit of hearing and seeing what Christ says and does, we should observe, that in the Samaritan is given us not only an example of love, but also and especially that in it we find represented the unspeakable grace and mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which He manifested in behalf of the whole human race. Mankind had been stripped by the devil of all divine knowledge and spiritual gifts, and instead of it had been smitten with blindness, contempt of God, etc., and thus shamefully wounded and disfigured, so that no fear, love and trust in God remains in the hearts of men, but the very opposite. Hence the Apostle St. Paul calls them "by nature the children of wrath." From such misery and ruin no creature in heaven or on earth can deliver us.

If we were to be delivered from this deplorable condition, from death and eternal damnation, it had to be done by the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the true Samaritan. He had to become man and take upon Himself our sins and diseases, and to assure us in His Word that by His sufferings and death He has rendered satisfaction for our sins, and by His resurrection has brought to light righteousness and eternal salvation. Of this however we shall speak more at the close.

If we believe these truths with all our heart, we will be urged by the example of the Samaritan to love our neighbor. It is the nature of the Word, whenever it is rightly heard and believed, to make such people as the Samaritan here, who are full of pity and kindness toward every sufferer. When they find others in misery, they are ready to deliver them at their own trouble and expense. I have reference here to the help of indigent poor who are not in the habit of begging, like the indolent, idle and slothful professional beggars, who never can be induced to labor, but wander about over the whole country. Such vagabonds should not be supported. But when a Christian meets a worthy poor person he will be ready to help, like the Samaritan. He will reason thus: It is my neighbor, a man composed of body and soul like myself, and having the same God that I have. Hence he has

also more claim on me than any other creature, and I will not pass him by. Come, dear brother, let me help thee, etc. He has compassion on him, as the Samaritan had compassion on the man having fallen among thieves, or a mother on her sick and suffering child. These are the true saints.

The over-sanctified, like the priest and the Levite, who put a high estimate on themselves, have no pity on the poor, but are rude and cruel people. They take it for granted that God is well satisfied if they serve Him, without ever thinking of serving also their fellow-men. The priest was considered holy on account of his birth and office; for this reason also he was conceited to such a degree, that he cared for nobody, as is said of him in the text, that he saw the abused man in his wounds, and did not care for him in his misery, but passed by on the other side.

But these are miserable saints, who, seeing their neighbor suffering and having the power to help them, will not do it. God can never be pleased with them. And what is it that they depend on? Nothing but their holiness according to the external letter of the law. Such is the case also with the saints of the pope, monks and priests, even of the better kind; when they have read mass, brought their offerings, finished their singing, etc., they imagine that they have done their full duty and must not be expected to do anything more. These are the superlatively righteous, the saints of the devil, who imagine God to be their debtor, but they themselves debtor to no man.

Against such shameless saints the parable of our text is directed. The Savior here speaks to such a would-be-saint, a proud lawyer, who not only boasts of his piety, but even endeavors to convict the Savior of error and to show that he is a better Doctor of Divinity than Christ. For when the Lord magnifies the Gospel, saying: "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see; for many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them," the lawyer takes exception, and thinks of the law of Moses which is read, taught and enforced, and considers it impossible for Christ to teach anything higher and more noble. Therefore he inquires "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" As though he would say: You will not be able to teach anything better than Moses has taught us. Therefore not those merely are blessed that hear you, but those also that hear and keep the law of Moses. You are going too far. It would be more than enough for you to be a teacher like Moses. But when you reject

Moses as an imperfect teacher who does not show the true way of eternal life, and pretend to be a better teacher than he is, you presume too much.

This thought of the lawyer the Savior perceives full well. Therefore He does not give him a direct answer, but leads him to find the answer himself and confess that the law of Moses is not sufficient to obtain eternal life. “He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?” And the lawyer is ready with an answer at once, saying: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart — and thy neighbor as thyself.” This he supposes to be the very essence of all doctrine, and thinks that no one could produce anything better; and it is true, Moses can teach nothing higher and better than this.

But what is our Lord’s answer? He tells the lawyer: “This do, and thou shalt live.” As though He would say: The teachings of Moses are good and right, but neither you nor anyone else will derive from it any real benefit. The reason is, because you do not and cannot keep them. The lawyer feels the strait in which he finds himself and is ashamed of it. He dare not say that he has kept the law, yet he is not willing to confess that he has failed to fulfill it. He therefore asks another question: “Who is my neighbor.” The would-be teacher is manifestly in difficulty. By asking who his neighbor is he admits that he has not loved his neighbors, inasmuch as he has not even learned to know them. What good can he now derive from the law of Moses?

Therefore the Lord presses him still more closely in the parable of the wounded man, saying: A priest saw him and passed by, and a Levite did the same. Both were as pious as you. But the Samaritan took pity on the poor man. Which now of these three was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And the lawyer had to answer: “He that showed mercy on him.” The proud hypocrite will not even mention the name of the Samaritan.

Therefore the Lord gives him a good lesson, saying: “Go and do thou likewise;” as much as to say: You are just as much of a pious saint as were the priest and the Levite; you will not give a penny to save your neighbor from death; and yet you ask: “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Do you not have many poor friends and neighbors? and are you not surrounded by sorrowing people? Is there not misfortune, anguish and tribulation in the world everywhere? And are you yet so rude a teacher as to ask who your

neighbor is? If you wish to be holy, love your neighbor as yourself, following the example of this Samaritan.

This was a hard medicine; as though the Savior would say to the lawyer: You have all this time not even learned to know who is your neighbor, much less loved him as yourself. Whose is the fault? You have Moses and the law. If that is all that is needed for salvation, you would be altogether safe. But if you keep the law according to the outward letter only, you have gained nothing, but remain a sinner as before; and the law is nothing but a witness, testifying against you before God on account of your sins. You are far from being saved.

Whoever wishes to understand well why the law does not save us, let him take the two points of which the lawyer here speaks, and study diligently what is meant by “loving God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself;” and he will learn that this is exceedingly difficult, yea even impossible, unless the Holy Ghost is given us through our Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel. It is easy to say: I love God, and no one can say much against it. But if God were Himself visibly present, we would soon see who loved Him and risked any thing for Him. But He is not thus present, so that we can see Him and serve Him as men are served who are with us and around us.

Therefore if you would know who loves God, inquire whether children honor their father and mother, whether servants are obedient to their masters, and whether people do their duty towards the servants of the Church. In this way we may learn to know those who love God and those also who do not love Him. For to children the commandment is given: Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother. A monk and a nun may rejoin: I leave father and mother, and honor Thee, who art the God of heaven. But such a service, God says, I do not want. Here is my command: “Honor thy father and thy mother.” If thou lovest me, thou wilt also love and honor thy father and thy mother. This is called loving God.

Of such an obedience, however, the over-sanctified people of our day do not wish to hear; they want to invent something better, as is seen from the conduct of the unspiritual people in popery. Thus their children, though they remain with their parents, wish to have their own way or rather be dead. Concerning these we have to conclude that they do not love God.

Thus also we find it in other stations in life. The head of a government commands his officers to be honest and faithful in their office. If now you will ask them: Do you love God? perhaps no one will say, no, but all exclaim: I love God! why should I be an enemy of God? But say, my dear friend: Why are you disobedient and unfaithful? If you loved God from all your heart, or even to some extent, you would serve your master more diligently.

There is hardly a man-servant or a maid-servant, though they know anything of God and are careless and unfaithful besides, who would confess that they are enemies of God and do not love Him. But why act the hypocrite? Why does the lawyer, and all people as they are by nature, say: I love God, when it is not so? It is easier said than done.

And what does it mean to love God? It means to keep His Word and command; as Christ saith: "If a man love me, he will keep my words." If we love God we will not despise His commandments. And what does God command all laborers and servants? Yea, what do they themselves promise their masters? God requires them and they themselves promise to be faithful and obedient; diligently to fulfill their duty, and by so doing to serve and benefit their employers, for which, in return, they have their home, their wages, and their daily bread. For this reason they are, in some parts of the country, called help, because they aid the family in obtaining support and the necessaries of life. But where is such help, man-servant or maid-servant, to be found? Very often we find them to be disobedient, indolent and proud, using bad language, neglecting and destroying, or even robbing and stealing whenever they have a chance. These do not love God, but are His enemies, because they do not keep His Word, else they would surely be more honest and faithful. And because they do not love God nor keep His Word, it is not at all strange to find them without success and the blessing of God, and to see them hobble along like beggars all the days of their lives.

Concerning the experience of pastors and servants of the Church it is not necessary here to say much. It is obvious how they are dealt with by officers, collectors, judges, citizens, peasants and neighbors; they are treated with less respect than herders of cattle and swine. God has earnestly commanded us to honor love and esteem them, and especially to give them their hire, as is seen in the prophet Malachi. And Christ Himself saith: "A laborer is worthy of his hire." Therefore," it is wrong before God to

withhold from servants what is their due, so it is sinning before God to withhold any dues from pastors and servants of the Church. God will punish such wrongs in some way, by thunder-storms, loss of cattle, fire, floods, and other misfortunes; He will take ten times more than the amount you withhold from your pastors; or steal from them.

Children of this world do not love God but hate and despise Him, and are His enemies. Not to love God might seem to be harmless, if this were only without enmity. But nearly everyone will say: God forbid, that I should be His enemy. And yet you are so. For if you murmur against father and mother, master or mistress or magistrate, and do not do what you have been commanded, you despise and hate God and are His enemy; because He commands you to be obedient and to honor them by obedience. "You are an enemy of such a command, because you do not want to hear nor obey it, which is nothing else but enmity against God.

Thus our people may pretend to love God, but when they are told that God requires of them not to be avaricious, not to sell above value, to be honest in buying and selling, etc., they become all the more contrary, and continue in their evil practice in spite of all teaching and admonition. They will tell their pastors not to meddle but to attend to their own business. And yet it is the business of pastors, because it is God's business whose servants they are. Before they are aware of it, God will repay them by pestilence, famine, fire, floods, wars, and all kinds of tribulation. By these means God will deprive them of their wrongfully obtained riches, whilst they might, if as Christians they would have increased in favor with God and man, have increased also from day to day in things belonging to this world.

Thus we may observe everywhere the Word of God not merely neglected, but even persecuted, not only by the pope, bishops and others, who defame and condemn it, and in every way persecute and murder those who preach and hear it, but also by merchants, farmers, noblemen, and others who belong to us. They all should esteem and observe the Word of God, live peaceably with their neighbors, and especially give the servants of the Church what they owe them. But as it is, they would readily take from them, if they could, and be proud of it.

Let us therefore learn to understand that it is not enough to have the Word of God, but that we are required also to love God, to be obedient to

Him, and to observe His Word, saying: O, Lord Jesus! Thou hast opened my eyes to see that by Thy death I have been redeemed from sin, and by Thy resurrection I have been made righteous and an heir of the eternal kingdom of heaven; I thank Thee for this unspeakable goodness, and promise also, on my part, cheerfully to do what I know Thou wilt have me do. Thou hast commanded me to honor my father and mother; I will do it with all cheerfulness. Thou hast commanded me to serve my employer faithfully and to be obedient; I will gladly do it. Thou hast made me a father or mother: I will endeavor to be pious and cheerfully do my duty, and will rather die than be disobedient to Thee and unfaithful and a stumbling-block to my children and servants. This would be the proper fruit derived from the Word of God, and might indeed be called heartfelt love to God. And it is impossible that God should not reward such pious Christians, who honor and love the Word of God, with happiness and eternal salvation.

How important, therefore, for every one that he should examine his heart carefully, and learn to know whether he truly loves God! To love God is not a mere matter of thought, as is supposed by fanatical monks, but becomes manifest in love to our neighbors. "For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen," St. John saith, "how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" Hence the Lord tells us: If you will love me, love your father and mother, child, husband, wife, master and mistress. Such is my command. And if we examine ourselves whether we comply with this demand, we shall be able also to tell whether we love God or are His enemies.

Those who have the Word of God and love the Lord Jesus Christ are indeed few in number. Of true Christians alone this can be said, though they are not as perfect as they ought to be. Christians determine to love and serve their neighbors. And when they are overtaken by wrath, impatience, and other frailties, they are sorry for it and repent of it. This, we say, is the course of Christians, but of no one else.

From this we are permitted to draw the conclusion that generally our people, children and domestics, rulers and subjects, are children of the devil, because they are enemies of God, since they disregard His Word and command, as can be seen everywhere. God has created them; He has given them body and soul, meat and drink, and even His only begotten Son, all of which they repay by heinous ingratitude, and act as though they could live and prosper without Him; yea, if they could they would dethrone Him. This

inference we must draw from the manner in which they abuse the Word and command of God. There we find no love to God, but rather enmity against Him and His Word, yea even following the devil, who tempts to avarice, usury and all manner of evil, and who has brought sin and death upon all and finds great pleasure in our disobedience to God.

Thus the world in general is serving the devil in hell, whose pleasure it is to make men enemies of God and to induce them to be disobedient to Him. This terrible enemy has already caused our sin and death, and would not hesitate a moment to destroy grain and wine and bring about a famine, if he were permitted to do so. And yet this greatest of all enemies, who has done us so much injury, is continually served, whilst our merciful God in heaven, who has given us all and especially His own Son, is despised and rejected in His Word and command.

Would not God be justified in destroying all by thunder and lightning, or by pestilence and hell-fire, which indeed will take place? Is it not the greatest of lamentations that men refuse to love God, who has poured upon us an abundance of temporal and spiritual blessings, and again that they should serve the devil cheerfully with body and soul, who rewards them only with all kinds of calamity here and at last with death eternal?

Let us learn therefore what it is to love God. The Samaritan in our text loves God; not as though he had given anything to God, but because he helps the poor wounded man as much as he can. The Lord tells us: If you will love and serve me, then love and serve thy neighbor; he needs it, I do not. Hence our Samaritan serves our Lord God in heaven with his money, beast, oil and wine. Not as though God Himself stood in need of these things, but He wants them for our neighbor. And yet, if we serve our neighbor, God will consider it to be done unto Him, because of His having commanded it.

Other things by which the world may think to serve God, such as pilgrimages to St. James or to Rome, building costly churches, and the like, God has not commanded. He wants us to serve and help each other. You need not seek me in Rome, He saith, but you will find me at your own home, with your wife, children, servants, magistrates and governors; also in the house of your neighbor, on the street, in the market place, and everywhere; there do your duty as required by love and friendship, and I

will acknowledge it as having been done unto me. How could He make it easier for you? But the devil blindfolds the world, so that men cannot see what is really meant by loving God and hating the devil.

Therefore endeavor to imitate the example of the Samaritan who helps the wounded man in his distress and cares for him, in the same way as in a similar condition he would desire others to do unto him, and thus receives the praise of having loved God and his neighbor. This, I say, you should learn, that you may do likewise. It is a fruit to be produced in those who have the Word. Those void of these fruits are false Christians, like the priest and the Levite, who were over-sanctified, or saints of the devil. For whoever passes by his neighbor passes by his God. Therefore do not follow the example of the world, who are enemies both to God and man, but show love to every one and God will reward you. But whoever does not love God, that is, does not, according to God's command, assist and help his neighbor in time of need, has no compassion on him and passes him by, will surely, in due time, receive his reward and be punished. Let this be remembered by all.

Thus our text contains a beautiful and important doctrine. It teaches us what we must do, if we would belong to the company of those who love God; namely, that we must love our neighbor and assist him in his time of need. This God will accept as having been done unto Him.

To the lawyer the Lord gives wholesome instruction, saying: "Go and do thou likewise." He again wants to show that he has never done the will of God and was never able to do it; that he might know and confess, that though he has Moses and the law, this is not sufficient to obtain eternal life; that if he wants to be saved he must have forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, and also the Holy Ghost who changes the heart unto true obedience. For without the holy Ghost, bestowed for Christ's sake, it is impossible to fulfill the law in the least. Without the Holy Ghost the heart remains impure and sinful. Even if in this case external works of the law are performed, they are nothing but hypocrisy and cannot please God.

Hence the decision of our Lord Jesus is firm and sure: Those eyes, and ears only are blessed which see and hear the things which are seen and heard by the disciples; whilst those who see and hear nothing but Moses

and the law, which do not change the heart, but leave it wicked and impure as it was before remain in death.

From this we can easily learn to answer the objections of the Papists when they tell us: Christ says, “do this and thou shalt live,” and when they draw the conclusion that man may be saved by the works of the law. By the words, “do this and thou shalt live,” the Savior would tell the lawyer and all of us, that no one is able to fulfill the law, because we are all sinners and stand in need of being cleansed from sin by the Holy Ghost, bestowed upon us in the Gospel. Therefore the Savior’s words here are a preaching of the law, which requires of us to do the will of God. But from this it does not follow that we are able to do His will. This the Savior can accomplish in us only by the Gospel and the Holy Ghost. For this reason He uses the parable of the man falling among thieves, to show us in what terrible condition we all are, from which none but He Himself, the true Samaritan, can deliver us.

By sin we poor men have fallen among the worst kind of thieves. The devil and death have overcome us. They have not merely stripped and robbed us of all spiritual gifts which God had given us, but they have also wounded and abused us; that is, on account of sin we have been made subject to all manner of evil and misery. And from this misery we are not delivered by the priest and Levite, that is, by the law; they pass by on the other side and will not help poor men; as the Apostle saith: “By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight.” At last, however, our dear Lord Jesus Christ, the true Samaritan, approaches, though His own people receive Him not and take Him to be a heathen and possessed of devils. This Savior has compassion on us. He binds up our wounds, pouring in oil and wine, the blessed oil of divine grace, by taking our sins upon Himself and bringing us into the true inn, that is, the Christian Church, commanding the host, the servants of God in the Church, to take care of us.

But alas! the great majority neglects this office, as is seen from the conduct of the pope, bishops and others. The Church is like a hospital which is managed by an unfaithful indolent, and rude superintendent, and in which patients are shamefully neglected. The officers of the Church should preach the Word of God, but they reject it; they should lead people to Christ and deliver them from sin. but they plunge them into it still more deeply. Yet we observe that our Lord Jesus Christ does not suffer His hospital, the Christian Church, to be destroyed altogether. If the pope and his bishops do

not want to preach the pure Gospel, they may let it alone. God will reward them according to their deeds, at last. In the meantime our dear Lord Jesus Christ calls some who are poor, low, and despised in this world to preach His Word and to take care of the suffering patients by applying to them the Gospel, from which they derive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. For without the preaching of the Gospel it is impossible for us to come to the enjoyment of such a treasure.

May we therefore thank God for these blessings with all our heart, and ask Him to make us steadfast in His grace and give us everlasting life.

Amen.

Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity.

Luke 17:11-19.

And it came to pass, as He went to Jerusalem, that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered into a certain village, there met Him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when He saw them, He said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God; and fell down on His face at His feet, giving Him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And He said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

At the close of the Gospel lesson for today the Lord extols faith. "Thy faith hath made thee whole," He says to the Samaritan who had been a leper. He does not give honor to Himself, else He would have said, I have helped thee; but He gives faith the praise. Thereby He wishes to induce us, according to this example, to have full confidence in God, and to be sure that We shall obtain in Christ Jesus what we believe. If we believe that we have forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Christ, we shall have it. If we believe that God will be gracious and merciful unto us for Christ's sake, He will be gracious and merciful unto us. Therefore all shall be ascribed to faith, not unto God, though upon Him everything depends. And we all should perceive, that if we do not obtain that which we desire and need, it is not the fault of God that we do not obtain it, but the fault of our unbelief; for if we were strong in faith, we surely should obtain it.

The first doctrine of our text therefore is this, that we may know all things to be granted of God that we believe, and that we may be comforted. But whoever will not believe in God nor expect anything good from Him, should not think of obtaining anything, as St. James says in his epistle, in the first chapter. For whoever will deal with God and ask anything of Him, must not doubt and waver, or say: Who knows whether God will answer my prayer, or whether I will be counted worthy of it? By no means. You should rather say: I know, that whatever I ask of God, for Christ's sake, He will cheerfully give and do. And though He may not answer my prayer now, and as I wish Him to answer it, He will answer it nevertheless at some other time and in some other way. A wavering heart which does not believe and is not sure of obtaining anything, will never obtain it. God cannot grant him anything, though He would like to do it. It is like a vessel which a man holds in his hand, but which he shakes so that no one can pour anything into it; though one would like to pour something into it, all will be wasted. Such is the case with a wavering heart. God loves to give all we need; but we stand before Him like poor beggars, holding forth our hats for Him to throw something into them, and yet not holding still for that purpose. The Lord our God does not want to pour away His gifts, or to scatter and lose them, as if you would hold a flagon or flash, asking others to pour wine into it, whilst you were moving it hither and thither. This would cause the host to be very much offended, especially if he intended not to charge you for the wine, but to make you a present of it. He would soon tell you to be gone, because he does not intend to pour the wine on the ground. Exactly so it is with a wavering and unbelieving heart; God cannot pour anything into it, though He would like to do it.

But again, when we do not waver, but keep quiet, He loves to give. This we observe in the case of the ten lepers. They stood afar off and said: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." They rest secure, and doubt not of His help. Therefore as they believe, so is it done unto them. Their example should teach us to trust in the goodness of God; not to waver, but to be confident in all that we ask, be it for health, food, success, wisdom or righteousness. These things God loves to give, if they redound to His honor or promote our salvation — unless He delays in order to try us, whether we will continue in prayer and faith. This is the first point of our Gospel lesson, which requires us to pray in faith, and not to doubt concerning the gracious will of God in Christ Jesus.

The other point presents a terrible example of ten lepers, who have the true faith and are cleansed, but nine of them fall away and are ungrateful after having obtained so great a blessing.

This example is intended to make us thankful and to keep us from the terrible vice of ingratitude. For it is not more than right that God should have the honor of our thankfulness for all His benefits. This we should render Him willingly and cheerfully. Nor does this require much trouble or labor. What harm can it do you if you turn to God, saying: O Lord, Thou hast given me sound eyes, hands, feet, and many other gifts; they are Thy gifts, and I thank Thee for bestowing them upon me. So what harm can it do you if you thank your father and mother, master, mistress or neighbor, for the favors you have experienced at their hands? It will certainly cost you no limb, but merely tends to show that those favors are well applied and to induce others to continue in granting them. This is the case of the Samaritan; he returns to the Lord to thank Him. It costs him no penny, but only a few words, and it pleases the Lord so well that it is a marvel. People also like to see thankfulness; it does them good, and they are induced thereby to do good again.

Heathens even have said: Unthankfulness is the greatest of vices. Therefore if one is censured as unthankful, he has received the gravest censure. And yet we find such vice to be very common, experienced most by those who have most deserved our thanks. So in the case of father and mother, who risk life and being, honor and goods, and all they have for the good of their children. But how do children reward them? What is the experience of parents? A child very rarely turns out to be thankful. This is the work of the devil. And the same is the case in all other estates.

Therefore learn to beware of the great and terrible vice of unthankfulness, which closes up the springs of all faithfulness and well-doing among men. For when we find an ungrateful heart we lose all pleasure in affording further help and doing anything for such people. When one would help others, if he is not a Christian, he will find it very vexatious to receive scorn instead of thanks for favors done. The first utterance of such people will be, All kindness is lost upon such a rude fellow. He may go; I will not turn my hand for him nor help him a penny's worth. Thus people get impatient. And all this is caused by the shameful ingratitude, which is nevertheless so common a vice in this world.

Therefore, if you would be true Christians, learn to be thankful; first of all toward God, our gracious Father in heaven, who has given and still preserves to us our body and soul, and all things that pertain to eternal life. Then also be grateful to your parents, friends, and neighbors, who have been doing you so much good; endeavor to return these favors; and if you should not be able to do it in deeds, do it by grateful and friendly words. This is becoming, and God asks you to do it. Very few, however, do this. Because the children of this world cannot be induced to be grateful, not even in words, it is no wonder that people cannot be induced to reward the good they have received, as the proverb says: *Nihil citius senescit, quam gratia.*

In the monasteries young people used to be trained, even for the gift of a sharpened pen, to bow and to say: *Benedictus Deus in omnibus donis suis*; that is, God be praised for all His gifts. This was by no means an evil custom. It was done to accustom young people to receive everything with thankfulness toward God and man. And though this gratitude did not always come from the heart, it was nevertheless well to be thankful at least in words. Thus also it is written in the 116th Psalm: “What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord,” that is, I will praise, adore, and thank Him for all His benefits toward me. This, my child, the Lord says, is all I ask of you.

But there are few in whom our kind Father in heaven can accomplish this. Most people persecute and slander His Word and do not remember that all we have is a gift of His grace. Yea, even more, God’s only begotten Son, who has been given us as a comfort against sin and eternal death, they nail to the cross. This is indeed a world deserving no good thing at the hands of God, but rather His wrath. And yet He is not wroth, but continues to be kind and merciful and to help everywhere.

Hence it is not sufficient for us to be grateful. We also should learn to practice the virtue of suffering ingratitude. This is a virtue only of God and of true Christians. We have many examples to prove that unbelievers cannot practice it. The Grecians have had excellent men, who defended their fatherland faithfully even at the risk of their own lives. But when they found that their labors were not appreciated and that instead of being permitted to enjoy a thankful acknowledgment of their deeds, they were

reproached and oppressed, they became impatient; so much so, that instead of defending their country against its enemies, they joined these enemies and became the bitterest foes of their fatherland. This is the manner of our nature, but it is an evil manner, which we should give up, and follow the manner of God, who hates ingratitude as a great and shameful vice, and yet is not moved thereby to become wicked Himself; He remains good and gracious toward every body that needs His help.

Whoever therefore would be a Christian must not expect always to receive thanks for his well doing, faithfulness and services, but also to suffer ingratitude. With great care he should guard against being led on that account to stop serving and helping others. It is a Christian virtue and a real fruit of faith, if, after you have done your best, and are rewarded with evil, you continue to exercise patience and conclude: No, such experience shall not discourage me; I will bear and yet help wherever I can. If you will be ungrateful, I know of one in heaven who will thank me in your stead. This is more precious to me than your thanks. Such conduct is indeed Christian; Solomon calls it pouring burning coals upon the head of the unthankful.

This proficiency you will never learn from the children of this world. They do the very opposite. If they are treated with ingratitude, they think at once that all the good they have done is in vain and lost, and that therefore they will not squander their favors in future. You must learn it of our Father in heaven. He makes His sun to shine not merely for the pious who thank Him for it, but also for the wicked who do not thank Him, but rather abuse all His gifts. Of right He might also say: I have made the sun to shine these many years; I have given grain, wine and all kinds of produce and benefits, but I receive no thanks; therefore I will let the sun shine no longer and will let the ungrateful world die of hunger. Yet our gracious Father does not deal thus. Never, He says, shall the ingratitude of the world suffice to make me angry. If they will not be thankful, I will continue to be gracious, and in due time call the unthankful to account.

If we want to be Christians we should learn to do the same. For it is the nature of Christian love to bear all things and to suffer all things without being provoked to bitterness. But there are few who have such love; therefore we have very few true Christians. Yet if we would be Christians we should learn cheerfully to do good to others and to help them, and not be offended nor think it strange when we meet with ingratitude, as the children

of this world do who are pained and very much offended if their benefits are not appreciated. But let your thoughts and actions be different. If you do good to a person today and he turns from you in ingratitude, let not this affect you in your action tomorrow. He himself will reap the consequences of such ingratitude. Do you proceed and say: If my favors are lost in one case, let me soon have another chance to do good. If in this case also it is in vain, then give me a third chance, and so on, so that you may apply the words of Christ: "Were there not *ten* cleansed? but where are the *nine*?"

Our dear Lord also receives very little thanks; but he is satisfied if even one out of ten comes to thank Him. He would not even have inquired after those nine, had it not been for the purpose of pointing them out as unthankful. As though He would say: If you are determined to be unthankful, then just wait; you will not escape; I will in due time inquire where you are, that you have not thanked me for giving you body and soul and all you needed. Then it will appear what a shameful vice ingratitude is.

Hence We must accustom ourselves to condemn unthankfulness and learn from the example of Christ. Experience teaches, and everybody has opportunity to see it, that if God gives us ten fruitful years we scarcely thank Him for one of them; yea, the worst of it is that we always shamefully abuse the products of the most fruitful seasons. If God grants us a year of much wine, grain, and other products, we always find avaricious men who will purchase these articles and wait for high prices. Others again give themselves up to drunkenness, and waste and squander because they have a rich harvest, and thus show their ingratitude to God for His blessing. Thus the Lord is scarcely thanked for the tenth part of His gifts and blessings. This we should remember and not feel hurt, but be satisfied if we meet only one among ten who appreciates and is grateful for benefits received. The rest will come to see their mistake some day. God, who wants them to be grateful, will call them to account at last.

You have thus learned two lessons from the "Gospel of today, the first treating of faith, and the other of the two beautiful virtues of gratitude and patiently suffering ingratitude. Thankfulness we are to learn from the Samaritan, and, according to his example, be thankful toward God and man.

From Christ we should learn not to be offended, much less withdraw our favors from some because others have been ungrateful for gifts received.

For, as I have said before, among unbelievers it is a common vice that people are offended by unthankfulness and made unwilling to help, so that they withhold their favors from ten on account of the ingratitude of one. But if you are a Christian, then act differently. If you are deceived by nine, be satisfied if one only is grateful. For Christ Himself does not find people grateful for benefits, be they ever so great. Would you expect more than He? Then be satisfied with one out of ten, and you shall have not less than Christ. The unthankful shall themselves have the loss, and no success and prosperity.

In short, we shall be good Christians if we are firm in our faith and have confidence in the goodness of God, and besides be not only thankful, but also able to bear unthankfulness. For we cannot expect to fare any better than Christ. We are required to do good to others, and not be surprised if one only appreciates our favors and shows himself to be grateful. And it may even be the case that he is the one whom we least expected to be grateful, as was the case with the Samaritan.

May the dear Lord our God grant that we may remember this and improve by it. Amen.

Fifteenth Sunday After Trinity.

Matt. 6:24—34.

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Be hold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

This is a rich Gospel and a long sermon directed against avarice, which is hateful in the sight of God and one of the greatest obstacles to the spread of the Gospel. And yet we see that the whole world is drowned in it, for every one troubles himself with cares day and night about securing a living. None is satisfied with what God provides and bestows; they all crave for more

and loftier things. Whoever has succeeded, by the help of God, to possess a house, desires to have a castle; and if he has a castle, he would like to own a whole town: he is never satisfied, but ever looking for more. Every one desires to increase his possessions and to rise higher. If it were not for pride and avarice, we would all have enough and not be annoyed by such anxiety, scratching and scraping as we find everywhere.

Such unchristian conduct the Savior would oppose in this sermon, and is therefore very severe. “No man,” He saith, “can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other.” From this it is obvious that the Lord considers mammon to be in opposition to His service. Hence our text is not calculated for young people. Children, thank God, would rather eat cherries than count money; they prefer a beautiful apple to a piece of gold, and do not inquire about the price of grain, because they are sure that they will find enough to eat.

This text is designed rather for the heads of families, for those in office, and especially for the preachers of the Gospel, who have to contend with great difficulties and some of whom are compelled to struggle hard for the support of wife and children. These the Lord here comforts and would deliver them from such cares, telling them to look at the fowls of the air. If God so richly provides for these, He will certainly also provide for them and keep them from starving.

Hence this sermon is not especially intended for the youth; for these think that kitchen and granary are filled, and leave the care to others. But we old fools have the misery of being addicted to cares for the body and being haunted by fears of starvation. But because our Lord Jesus is so very decisive in declaring it impossible to serve both God and mammon, it will be necessary to learn what is meant by the service of God.

To serve, in general, means to do what has been commanded. To say, I serve my Lord, is the same as to say, I do what my Lord has commanded me. A service has reference to a word and command, and not so much to the person. A master or mistress do not need to command the servants to eat and to drink; this they will do of themselves. But they must see to it, that they do what they have been commanded. If, however, a servant is wicked

and slothful and does not perform what his master has commanded him, but rather what others tell him to do, he may be said to “serve two masters.”

In the same way we must speak of the service of God. To serve God means simply to hear what He saith, and to do it cheerfully and readily. And what does God say or command? First of all He commands us to hear the Lord Jesus and to accept the Gospel. This is the only true and acceptable service which we can render unto God; because His command to do it is plain and clear. Then He commands children to honor their father and mother, and parents to educate, teach and support their children; that the wife love her husband and attend to her household duties, and that the husband support and protect his wife, etc.

Children serve God when they honor father and mother. For this is the command of God. So also when servants of a household faithfully do what they have been commanded, they are not merely serving their master, but God in heaven also, who has commanded them to be faithful to their earthly master.

Thus we might go on through all stations and callings in life. Every one could enter into the service of God, if he would only learn what is meant by serving God. For it does not consist in work, but in the word and command of God. The world considers it something great if a monk denies himself every temporal enjoyment, enters a cloister, and leads a life of privation by fasting, watching, praying, and the like. In this case there is no lack of work, but a lack of divine command. God has not commanded him to do so; and therefore it cannot be pointed to as a service of God. On the other hand it appears to be an insignificant thing for a maid-servant to cook, wash dishes, sweep the house, and the like. And yet, because God has commanded her to do so, her work is truly a service of God, and excels by far all so-called holiness and hard life of monks and nuns. These have no command for their work, whilst here we have a command to honor father and mother and to assist in domestic affairs.

Hence it is indeed a service of God to do what He has commanded and to leave undone what He has forbidden. And everywhere God may be served, not merely in the church, but also at home, in kitchen and cellar, in the workshop and in the field, by people in cities and in the country, if we all would only heed and understand. For God has not merely ordained the

government in Church and State, but also in the family; this also He wants us to support. And when this is attended to by parents and children, servants and neighbors, they all serve God, because He has so commanded them.

A maid-servant might be of cheerful heart and say: I cook, make the beds, sweep the house. Who has told me to do so? My master and mistress, it is true. But who has given them power over me? God Himself. Then certainly it must be true that I am serving not merely my earthly master, but also my heavenly Master, and that God must be pleased with my work. What more blessed occupation could I wish? It is the same as if I were cooking for God in heaven.

If we thus looked upon our service and calling we would have reason always to be cheerful and happy, notwithstanding our cares and troubles, which would never become too hard to be borne. This however the devil is busily engaged to prevent. He cannot see us cheerful in doing what God has commanded, but causes us to do it with great reluctance, and not out of love to God and our fellowmen.

If a station in which one would be sure of serving God could be bought for money, all would be ready to pay for it everything they had. Just look at the foolish monks and nuns; they have done very much, hoping to serve God thereby. And yet, as I have said, the main thing was wanting in all their doing. For if you ask them why they entered the cloister, they cannot say that God has commanded them to do so. If they will tell the truth they must confess that it was their opinion that by so doing they would serve the Lord.

Therefore only the devil will thank them for the course which they pursue. It would be just as wrong as it is for my servant to sweep the house when I had commanded him to build a fire. Such a proceeding would certainly displease me and I would not thank him for it, especially if that servant would even defend his course and say: The sweeping of the house is harder work. The devil, I might answer, may reward you for it; he has commanded you to do it. You should have warmed the room for me, as I had told you, and not swept it.

The same is the case with monks and nuns, who glory in their work as a service of God, whilst God has never told them to perform it. Therefore if you want to serve God rightly, remain in your calling and station, be that ever so humble. And first of all listen to the Word of God in the Church and

also to the civil authorities, masters and parents, and be obedient. This is also very properly called a service of God.

Hence every one should notice and learn for himself, in whatever calling he may be, what may rightly be called a service of God; namely, all things commanded by God through pastors, parents, and masters. If you do this you may be sure of God's approbation, and your service will be no burden to you. God will be pleased because He is served. And whatever you thus do in your own house is as acceptable as if you had done it to God in heaven.

This is also the best adornment in the character of man, by which he is exalted above all other creatures, no matter how obedient they may be toward their Maker. For here we see that the sun, the moon, the earth, and all creatures, in obedience to God's order accomplish the object which God ordained for them. The sun gives light by day to all the world and the moon by night, and the earth _ produces fruit annually. And what is the object of water? What is it commanded to do? It is to produce fishes, as God commands in the book of Genesis. And this it does whenever sinful men do not hinder God's blessings or the execution of His commands. So all other creatures go forth to serve God in their most beautiful array. Christ says that "even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of the flowers or lilies of the field." What is a flower good for? What is its command? Nothing else than to be looked upon, to please the eye, and to disperse a sweet odor. If God then put such an high estimate on flowers, how much greater do you not suppose is the glory of man who is found obedient to His command?

A maiden dressing or adorning herself for a dance is doing a worldly work. If we judge it properly we must say: It is dung compared with the work she is doing in her calling, when she takes care of the children entrusted to her or when she does the work of the kitchen, as she has been commanded. Christians are praised in the 45th Psalm, when it says: "Kings' daughters were among the honorable women." But what kind of an ornament or beauty is that here spoken of, seeing that Christians here on earth are poor and despised? It is a spiritual beauty; no pearls, gold, silver or satin, but obedience to the command of God. Such beauty excels the beauty of the sun, because it is the beauty of God. He therefore who lives in obedience to the command of God is clothed in God's own beauty.

If a man were dressed in the attire of a king, or a woman in that of the queen of France, it would be a great thing, and every one would admire it. Yet it would be nothing compared with the beauty of a woman showing obedience toward God by loving and honoring her husband and by giving a proper training to her children. Over against such a beauty, all costly apparel, silk and satin and jewelry, is like the torn and patched apparel of a beggar. It is a beauty after the Word and command of God.

This is a real crown and a beautiful golden chain, as Solomon says, Prov. 1:8: "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother; for they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck."

Here on earth such obedience is not appreciated. But in the life to come it will be different. Then God Himself will acknowledge it and say: Come here, my child; thou hast been an obedient child, a faithful maiden, a pious servant. Then it will be seen that obedience toward God and His Word, even in an humble calling, is more beautiful than all the glitter of the whole world.

May this suffice concerning the first point, in which we have learned to know what it means to serve God. May we practice it and not be hindered in it by the service of mammon. Now let us also look at the comfort, and learn to guard against avarice.

In the first place, the Lord tells us: "No one can serve two masters." He also names two masters. The one is called "God," who is the true master and whom we ought to serve. The other is called mammon, who is not the true master, for which reason Christ forbids us to serve him. And how we are to serve God we have learned.

What it means to serve mammon the Savior tells us, that it is taking thought for our life, what we shall eat or drink or put on. The whole tenor of our text is directed against sinful cares, and requires us to avoid them altogether, because they are not merely useless and vain, but also opposed to the true worship and service of God. We should therefore guard against them and accustom ourselves to the service of God and trust in Him, being assured that He knows our wants and will cheerfully supply them, if we only confide in Him.

And we are encouraged to trust in God when we remember that, without our care, He has given us life and existence. We may here call upon the whole world as witness. Would you not prefer your life and existence to the food of the whole world? Your life is more than meat and your body more than all raiment. Are we not very unthankful people? He has given us already the greatest and best gifts, and should we not trust Him for the less? If a rich man had given to you a thousand pieces of gold, would you not trust in him for a pair of old shoes? Of such mistrust in the Lord of heaven we make ourselves guilty. He has given us great and most valuable gifts, and still we mistrust Him for the less valuable, for meat and drink. Let us think of it, how such mistrust must displease Him.

In like manner as we can learn from our life and existence, from our eyes, ears, hands, feet and every member of the body, that God is kind in bestowing them upon us, He also points us to other creatures in order that we may by their example learn to abstain from cares and trust in Him. Thus the birds, passing before our eyes, put us to shame, so that we might bow before them and say: My dear teacher, I must confess that I am not as skillful as you are. The little bird rests in its nest all night, without being disturbed by unnecessary cares. In the morning it arises bright and happy, taking its seat in a little tree and sings and praises God; then it looks around for food and finds it. Shame on us old fools, for not having learned to do as we are everywhere taught.

A bird is not given to cares, and thus deports itself like a perfect saint; it has neither fields, nor barns, nor granaries; yet it sings and praises God, is joyous and happy, because it knows of one who provides, the kind Father in heaven. Why do not we do the same? especially as we have the advantage that we can labor. We can farm land, gather the fruits of the field, and lay up for the time of need. And yet we can not rid ourselves of carking cares.

Therefore we should never forget the lesson concerning the fowls of the air. They are without care, cheerful and happy. And why should they care? They have an excellent master of kitchen and cellar, whose name is Father in heaven, and who has an eating-house as wide as the world. They may therefore fly whithersoever they please, they find a well prepared table. The same heavenly Father, Christ says, wants to be your master of kitchen and cellar also, if you only would believe it and have Him.

But, alas! we find the whole world to be a crowd of desperate misers, who do not trust in God nor serve Him, but who serve mammon and who care for nothing but riches. If they succeed in their efforts, they are of good cheer; if not, they are sorry and grieved and trouble themselves day and night. And again, if the house were filled with gold, yea the house itself were built of solid gold, or the waters of the Elbe and Rhine were one mass of gold, what good would it do you, if you had no grain, no beer, no wine, and no water? You certainly could not live on gold.

Such is indeed a miserable service of mammon, which even the heathen despised and mocked by inventing the fable, that a rich king in Phrygia, called Midas, was so avaricious that he wished everything he touched would turn to gold. His wish was granted. As soon as he touched his coat, table, seats, beds, doors, all turned into gold at once, even the knife to eat with, and meat and drink. Therefore the miser had to starve to death, because his unfortunate wish had been fulfilled. Therefore abhor all covetousness; you cannot live on gold or silver. And yet people are so blind and mad as not to be satisfied with meat and drink, but also to crave for gold and silver besides; as though they needed not what God bestows, but what He withholds.

Let this be considered by every Christian, and let not covetousness get control over him, but let him trust in God, who has given us and all creatures many evidences of His paternal care, that He will provide for us and not expose us to want, which we can not bear. This also is acknowledged by the psalmist when he refers to the young ravens, which God supplies with food. For this is the order of God always, that whenever He gives life He also provides means for the subsistence of that life. And if He does this in reference to animal life even, how much rather will He not do it as regards the life of men, and especially of His Christians, to whom He has not only given life and existence, but even His only begotten Son, so that they might live not only in time, but in all eternity? This is what the Lord Jesus desires. He would have us delivered from unbelief, which is the cause of all covetousness.

For what is accomplished, if we even trouble ourselves to death? It would be a foolish thing for a small man to sit down in a corner all the days of his life and worry himself about growing to the size of a large man. Would not all the world ridicule him and consider him a fool? Thus also,

the Savior says, the world acts by craving after money and goods. No one will get rich by it, no matter how much he cares. It all depends on the blessing of God, and not on our caring. If we are favored by the blessing of God we have all we need; if not, we shall not enjoy nor retain what we have, as we see from many examples.

This is also a reason which should move and induce us to believe that our cares are in opposition to faith and to God, and besides only torment us and do us no good. This we may call a true exhibition of covetousness, care and unbelief, which three are inseparably connected. If we would but use our reason we would hate these vices and guard against them.

The Lord however does not stop here. He also wants us to open our eyes when we are in the field or in a garden, and to look at the flowers; we will find them to be excellent teachers inculcating the highest of all sciences, to trust in God and to confide in Him for all good. There are flowers of all kinds of colors, most beautifully arrayed, that even an emperor or a king is not arrayed like one of them. Their splendor is but a dead thing. But the colors and beauty of a flower are natural and full of life. Nor does it grow as by mere chance. Here the Savior tells us in plain language: "God so clothes the grass of the field." As also He said before: Birds do not find their food by chance, but God the Father in heaven provides it and so orders it that every one gets its share. This is the case also with the flowers, as all may see. It is God's special order in creation, else we would not find them to be alike in color, leaves, number of leaves, veins, petals, etc. And as God has paid so much attention to grass, which was made only for the purpose of being seen and of serving as food for animals, is it not a sin and a shame for us to doubt the promise of God to provide raiment for us?

We have an advantage over the fowls of the air. We till the ground, we harvest, we fill our barns and cellars and gather a supply, at least for one day, which none of the fowls can do, and yet they are fed. So also, the Lord says, we have an advantage as it regards raiment. We raise so much flax, hemp, and sheep. In every family we observe much spinning and weaving. How can it be possible that man should be destitute of faith, and that he should have no hope to receive a portion for himself, especially if he is faithful in his labor?

Here we must make a distinction. Labor is not forbidden, but urgently commanded. We are not to be indolent and careless, but diligent always. Cares concerning meat, drink, clothes, and other necessities of life, however, are positively forbidden. Such cares would show that we had no confidence in God to provide for us. Thus God would be shamefully reviled.

Both must be together. In the first place, we should labor faithfully. This God commanded our first parents in Paradise. They should labor if they would eat. In the second place, we should be Christians and believe. And to believe means to trust that God is our Father, who knows what we need and who will cheerfully and kindly supply our wants. By the side of such faith anxious cares, or the thought for our life, cannot exist, or else faith is shaken and overcome. Hence the Lord forbids them. In few words He saith: "Take no thought." You have been commanded to labor; that is your duty; but to care is my part and office, because I am your Father and can accomplish some thing by caring, while you cannot.

Do according to my direction, therefore; but if you are disobedient, you are not my servants, but the servants of mammon. Him you love, but me you hate; to him you cleave, but me you despise. Many public examples bear undoubted testimony to this. Many a one who, at this moment, knew of a chance to make a gain of ten or twenty guilders, would eagerly embrace the opportunity and not think of going to church and of listening to the preaching of God's Word. To gain money he thinks of more importance; to listen to the preaching of God's Word, he argues, can be put off to a more convenient season. But it is nevertheless true, that our conduct toward the Word is our conduct toward God. Whoever despises the Word and prefers money, despises and hates God. No one can explain away this truth; the text is too clear and admits of no evasion.

Hence it is a Christian doctrine that we should take no thought, saying: "What shall we eat? or, what shall we drink? or, wherewithal shall we be clothed? After these things," the Savior saith, "the Gentiles seek," who do not know nor believe that they have a Father in heaven. But you have a Father in heaven, who has given you life and existence, yea also His own Son; He knows what you need. How can you therefore take Him to be so unmerciful and severe as not to provide for you, but to permit you to starve and to perish?

Do as you see your children do. They retire in the evening and sleep without any care. They do not trouble themselves with the question where they shall get a piece of bread or a dish of soup tomorrow. They know that their parents care for that. Do the same, beloved children, Christ here says, toward your heavenly Father, and you shall suffer no want. But do not give way to anxious thought or care, for by so doing you would show a distrust in God; rather leave all care to Him, and expect everything good from Him.

The Savior concludes our text by saying, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." This is a most necessary doctrine and a most precious promise. The children of the world seek first the kingdom of the world. They strive for earthly things which pass away. God's is a different kingdom; it is an eternal kingdom; this Christians should seek. This kingdom, Christ says, is within us; and is nothing else than to hear the Word and to believe, that is, to trust in God with all our heart and to know Him to be our Father. Wherever there is faith, there God dwelleth and produces righteousness and forgiveness of sins. Let this, the Savior says, be your first concern; cleave to the Word, hear it diligently, practice and believe in it.

After having sought the kingdom of God and His righteousness first, be content and do what each one, in his calling, may have been commanded. For Christians are not allowed to go idle, but are commanded to labor. Then all these things shall be added unto them. If God can afford to be kind even to wicked people, and to give them all they need, notwithstanding that they persecute and mock His Word and heap upon Him all possible shame and dishonor, how could it be possible for Him to forsake you, who love Him, cheerfully hear and spread His Word, and put all your trust in Him?

Thus the Lord teaches us to abide by the Word; to believe, to be godly, and not to give way to cares, assuring us that God will not withhold from us any needful thing. But what takes place? Most of men take their own course; despise the Word of God, and rather than go to church and hear the preaching of the Gospel they go to places of drinking, carousing and dancing. From this a scandalous life must follow. And it is impossible that prosperity should be the result, or that God should not punish such wickedness with disease, poverty, and all manner of evil.

But there is another evil connected with such a course. Most of these people neglect their labor and become indolent and careless; or, even if they labor and labor hard, they know no bounds in carousing, gambling and other carnal enjoyments, spending the earnings of a whole week in one day. This God has forbidden. He does not want us to go idle nor to squander, but to save our earnings.

Therefore the Lord says: "The fowls of the air sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns." As though He would tell us: You are doing both and should do both. You should both labor and save the proceeds of your labor for the time of need. But whoever will not do according to this command must not put the blame of his disappointments upon God. You cannot blame God for the consequences of your reckless and unchristian life, and of your idleness and squandering. God is ever ready to give, if you only would be a good Christian, hear and believe His Word, cast all cares upon Him, and labor faithfully. As is here said: "All these things shall be added unto you." But you are unwilling to listen. When it is time to go to church you lounge in bed, take a walk, or go carousing, and do the same when you are asked to work. A fowl even must labor by going after its food. God who has promised to feed it, will not throw feed into its nest.

Then mark this. Fear God, be faithful in thy labor, and leave all care unto Him. He knows how to provide for thee. Yet, as we have stated, be not covetous, but contented. Covetousness also is an abomination in the sight of God. This is the doctrine of our Gospel lesson.

May God grant us His Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, that we may improve by it and become more pious.

Amen.

Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity.

Luke 7:11—17

And it came to pass the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and much people. Now when He came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And He came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And He said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited His people. And this rumor of Him went forth throughout all Judea, and throughout all the region round about.

Much could be said about the Gospel-lesson of today. We will confine ourselves however to but two points. The first is how to find comfort in view of death; for on such comfort and doctrine all depends. The other is the Christian mercy and sympathy which we should exercise one toward another.

We here read of a poor widow, who, having lost her husband, now also loses her only son, and is in every way miserable and poor. Among the Jews it was considered a misfortune to have no son in the family, because their government was so constituted that a male heir was important. This woman therefore is a miserable and afflicted widow, and it looks as if God were her enemy and had for gotten her altogether, because He has first taken her husband, and now also her son. It would therefore be no wonder if she had despaired of God altogether.

Our Lord Jesus Christ cares for this woman, has compassion on her, raises her son from death and restores him to her, and causes a rejoicing ten times greater than was the grief. It is indeed a wonder that she did not at once fall down and die for joy.

This narrative we should take to heart that it may strengthen and confirm our faith. For Christ our Lord does not have in view the welfare of this woman only; He wants to teach all of us to look upon death as an insignificant thing, of which we have no reason to be afraid, but to await death and other misfortunes with a believing and patient heart, because we are assured of having a Lord who can easily help us and overcome death and other misfortunes. Behold how quickly and easily the woman is delivered, after having given up all hope of help. For who would have thought that the deceased son, who is carried to the grave for burial, should be restored to life?

After all hope had failed, our dear Lord Jesus Christ draws nigh and does nothing more than say: "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!" And at once the dead man arises and lives. Here we must confess that in the eyes of the Lord death is like life, and that it makes no difference to Him whether we live or are dead. For though we had died, for Him we are not dead, because He can overcome death and restore life by a single word. Therefore the Lord truly says: "God is not a God of the dead, but of the living." Though Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and other holy patriarchs are dead for us, yet they live unto God.

From the Gospel of today and from the son of the widow we should learn to perceive the great power which God, through Christ, will apply to us at the last day, when, by a word, He will recall to life all men and give everlasting salvation to believers. This will be done in the twinkling of an eye, in order that we may not doubt in the least either the power of our Lord Jesus to do this or His will gladly to do it. For here we have the example. The son of the widow is dead; he has lost the gift of hearing and all other senses. But when Christ speaks to him, he hears. This is certainly a strange and wonderful incident. He that does not hear, hears; and he that does not live, lives. Nothing is done but that Christ opens His mouth and bids him arise. The single word is so powerful that death has to vanish and life return.

But who believes it that Christ can so easily deliver us from death and restore us to life? Yet we see here that He is desirous of doing it. There is no one who asks Him for it. He has compassion on the woman in her distress, and without being asked, He approaches the bier and recalls her son to life. Therefore we should take to heart this example and not be afraid of death, but be comforted by the Lord Jesus. For our sake He has wrought this miracle. As though He would say to us all: I certainly know that you are afraid of death; but do not be afraid and let not your heart be troubled. Though death is terrible, yet what can it harm you? It may terrify you. But learn to avoid judging by your feelings and following your fears: look upon me, and remember what I can do and what I am desirous of doing; namely, that I can raise you from death as easily as you awaken a person out of sleep. And I will do it cheerfully and with pleasure. Neither the will nor the power to do it is lacking.

From this it must follow that those lying in the church-yards and under the ground sleep much more lightly than we sleep in our beds. For it may be the case that you sleep very soundly and that you may be called ten times before you hear once. But the dead hear and awaken upon a single word of Christ, as we see in the case of the young man and of Lazarus, John 11.

Before the Lord death is no death at all. For us it is called and is death when we die. But before God it is a light sleep which could not be any lighter.

These very facts our Lord Jesus wishes to impress upon our minds, so that we may not fear when pestilence and death itself draw near, but that we may learn to say: O death, What can you do even in your worst form? You have terrible teeth, which you show to frighten me, for I do not like to die. But I will not merely behold your work when you, like an executioner, draw the sword; but I will remember what our Lord can and will do when you have slain me; namely, that He is not afraid of you and does not care for your raging and destroying, but says: "O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction." If you can kill my Christians, I can destroy you and recall them to life again.

This is the great comfort which the Lord presents to us in the Gospel of today; that Christians, though they die, are not dead, but sleep so lightly that Christ can awaken them with a finger. It is very small honor to death that

when he is severest he can do no more than put a man to sleep. Christ will awaken him from that sleep by a word, as He says, John 5: “The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation.”

This comfort is enjoyed by Christians; Turks and Jews do not enjoy it, neither do the Papists. They know that they must die, and that judgment and hell will follow. But what do they do? They do not place their hearts and hopes upon Christ, but go to meet Him with their prayers, masses, indulgence, fasting, and other things. They take Christ for nothing else but a judge, who is appointed to judge and condemn. It is the work of the devil that men will represent Christ to be worse than death itself. Hence they must fear the day of judgment and have a timid and terrified heart.

This however is not the case with Christians. They know that, at the last day, Christ will judge the unbelievers who do not accept nor believe the Word. But with them it is different. They will say: I am baptized and believe in my Lord Jesus Christ, who has died for my sins and by His resurrection has acquired for me righteousness and eternal life. Why then should I be afraid? He is not my enemy, but my friend and advocate with the Father. Therefore it does not matter if I do die or the last day comes. My Lord Jesus looks on a little while when death does its work in killing me. And when it thinks me to be dead and its work done, I only sleep, and sleep so sweetly and so lightly that the Lord Jesus scarcely needs to open His mouth before I hear Him and arise to eternal life.

Then let us learn to know that we need not be afraid of death and the judgment. For Christ does not come to judge and to condemn us; He comes, as He came to the poor widow and her son, to raise us from the dead, and to restore us that we again may hear, see, speak, and do other things. Thus He will come to all of us, who believe in Him, and save us. Those only who do not believe will He judge.

Therefore we should learn to desire this Savior and believe Him, and become more firm in our confidence of such help and grace, and never be afraid of death and the day of judgment. For whoever gives way to fear does not follow the Lord Jesus, but the devil and his own flesh. It is certain that Christ will come at the last day and raise us up from the dead.

Therefore the bodies of Christians sleep in the grave until Christ comes and knocks at the grave, saying: Arise, arise! And we shall arise, from a quiet and pleasant sleep, and live with the Lord Jesus forever and be happy.

Thus should a Christian have a different heart from that of Turks, Jews or Papists; these get discouraged, alarmed, and despairing, and do not know how to help themselves. And it serves them right. Why do not the Papists, who call themselves Christians, also learn and believe that Christ is a Savior of believers, but a judge of the unbelievers? If you are a Christian and trust in the Lord Jesus, He will be your physician, and help and deliver you from death and the devil. But if you do not trust in Him, seeking help somewhere else, as the pope does and teaches, Christ will be your judge, because you are a servant of death and the devil, doing the work of death and the devil. These are enemies of Christ and will do nothing for His kingdom. Therefore Christ has to act as their judge, whilst to the pious who trust in Him He will give peace and rest in eternity.

After this doctrine, which is called the doctrine of faith, we should also learn from Christ to be merciful. You often hear, during the year, about love and the duty of serving one another. But to be merciful is more; it requires us to have compassion on people in distress. If I have, for instance, a poor and sick neighbor, I should not merely help him, but take his misery to heart as if it were my own, as we here see from the example of our Lord. He is a strange and unknown guest. But when He sees the misery of the widow, He has compassion on her as though the dead son were His own. He weeps with the mother, comforts and helps her.

This is the example of love flowing from faith, and such love will not be wanting if faith is of the right kind, We should never do like the wicked and reprobate people, whose number is very large also among us, and who seem to have hearts of stone and wood, to laugh at the misfortune of their neighbor, and to feel hurt when they see anyone having a penny. With Christians it should be different; they should have compassion on those in distress and be glad of the welfare of others; as St. Paul says, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep;" they should not be like the stones and blocks that glory in the misfortune of others and would like nobody to have anything but themselves.

Mercifulness however is of two kinds, as also misery is of two kinds, spiritual and bodily. When we see people in bodily distress, and observe also that they are without help, we should at once hurry to counsel and assist them with any means at our command.

Spiritual distress is that which the soul suffers: such as that of a young man who is growing up without the preaching of the Word, yea even despising it, does not pray, is licentious, disobedient and full of mischief. When such an one is admonished and, when this is without effect, severely rebuked by words or even with the rod, in order that he may be corrected of his sin and wickedness in time, this we call an act of mercy. For if the soul is afflicted by such faults, it is a great deal worse and more dangerous than if the body is afflicted by disease. Therefore it is our duty to show mercy to such a man, be it by words, rods, or stripes.

But is not that, you may ask, a dreadful mercy which is applied by a rod upon the body? And yet, what is to be done? When it is necessary we can do nothing else. Do not physicians sometimes take off an arm or a leg in order to save the body? So it is here. Such punishment we apply for the purpose of doing you good and of delivering you from the devil and his kingdom.

Is it not so that if you fell into the water and I seized you by the hair and pulled you out, you would thank me and not care for my hurting you in my effort to save your life. If then you can suffer to be hurt and suffer it willingly, when you are in bodily distress and when it is evident that it is for your own good, why would you think hard of it in this case, when danger threatens not the temporal, but the eternal life, not the body, but the soul?

Thus also it is a work of mercy which will be rewarded by God, to apply severe measures for the correction of wicked children and servants. This is a spiritual salve against the disease of the soul which may be called disobedience towards father and mother, master or mistress in a family. If then we behold a man in his misery and help him, it is a work of mercy.

This kind of mercy should be exercised by father and mother upon children and servants and by the magistrates in the government of their subjects. They should guard against the unwillingness and carelessness which are so frequent in applying such mercy. For he who would be

merciful by not punishing sin would be guilty of a double unmercifulness against his neighbor, and cause God's wrath to come upon him.

Bodily misery may also be great, as when a person falls into the water or the fire. In such a case one does not think of laying the hand on him gently so as not to hurt him, but of saving him. Why then should we deal gently only in the case of spiritual misery? Therefore we should apply, if need be, sharp words, hard stripes, and great earnestness, in order to save poor people from the net of the devil and to make them obedient.

Therefore take to heart the example of our dear Lord Jesus and learn what it is to be merciful; namely, that it is a virtue according to which we take pity on our neighbor in his misery. Such misery however, as we have said, is twofold. It is bodily misery to be sick, poor, and the like. If you find such misery in your neighbor and are moved by it to help him even at your own injury, you do right and well; you have not merely served your neighbor, but also God, who will reward you.

Spiritual misery consists in sin; such as disobedience, negligence, offensive words and works. It is mercy earnestly to correct and rebuke our subordinates. If it is in vain, then commit the rest to the executioner, for punishment must be inflicted. For the executioner also is a preacher of mercy; because the wicked will not hear nor be counseled; they ruin themselves and others, if mercy is not shown them and they are not restrained by the sword.

Therefore it is a work of mercy to decapitate or to hang, though it may hurt and seem to be terrible. If this were not done you would not be able to eat a bite in peace nor keep a spot of your skin sound. Therefore learn to be merciful, every one in his calling, and help in all misery, not merely in bodily, but also in spiritual, wherever you find it.

These are the two doctrines of the Gospel of today. The first is a doctrine concerning faith, and teaches us not to be afraid in misfortune, especially when we come to die, but to remember that in the Lord Jesus we have a Savior whose hand is almighty. Therefore we should never despair of His grace. Of ourselves and others we may, yea even must despair. In death they can do nothing; for them it is too powerful. In God, however, and in His Son Jesus Christ we have reason even to glory. Whatever we cannot do, He can do; and whatever we have not, He has. If we cannot help ourselves, He

can help us, and is desirous of doing it, as we learn from the text. Whoever cleaves to the Lord Jesus in all confidence, performs the right kind of service which is pleasing unto God. Those who are discouraged and despair are His enemies, and do not consider Him to be God, else they could also comfort themselves.

The other doctrine teaches us, like Christ to have compassion on our neighbor in his misery and to help him.

May God our Lord grant us His grace to learn both, and with the good people in the text praise the Lord Jesus for His benefits in all eternity.

Amen.

Seventeenth Sunday After Trinity. Luke 14:1-11.

And it came to pass, as He went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched Him. And, behold, there was a certain man before Him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And He took him, and healed him, and let him go; and answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straight way pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer Him again to these things. And He put forth a parable to those which were hidden, when He marked how they chose out the chief rooms, saying unto them, When thou art hidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more honorable man than thou be hidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room, that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher, then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Our Gospel lesson contains two points. The first concerns divine worship, or our duty toward God. The second treats of our duty to our fellow-men.

Concerning the first point the question arises: Is it better in the sight of God to keep the Sabbath or to help our fellow-men and do good? It is the object of the Pharisees to watch the Lord Jesus and see what He would do with the man having the dropsy. Their thought is that if He does not help

him He may be charged with being unmerciful and not helping others. But if He does help him, He may be called wicked for breaking the Sabbath. Thus He may be convicted of disobedience toward God and His Word. He may do what He pleases, He will be caught; He is hemmed in on both sides. An especially serious matter they consider the breaking of the Sabbath. For with the Jews the Sabbath was a most holy institution which they guarded with great care.

According to the opinion of the Pharisees, the Lord Jesus is entrapped without any chance to escape. What shall He do? He takes a straight forward course, does what is right, puts the Pharisees to shame, and drives them into such a strait that every one can see what fools they are, though they are regarded as spiritual rulers who are to teach and to lead the people and who are therefore considered great doctors.

The sum of the matter is that our Lord boldly tells the Pharisees that they do not know what it is to keep the Sabbath day and to sanctify it. According to your idea, He tells them, it is sanctifying the Sabbath day to be altogether idle and to do no work whatever. No, this is not the meaning of the Sabbath day. To sanctify the Sabbath day means to hear the Word of God and to help our neighbor wherever we can. God does not want a keeping of the Sabbath day in which our neighbor is neglected or left to suffer. For if I serve and help my neighbor, I have kept the Sabbath as it should be kept, and have done a truly good work. This doctrine concerning the Sabbath day shows us how to understand the third commandment aright, according to which we are required, not to be idle or to do nothing, but to hear the Word of God and to live according to that Word. And what does that Word teach us? It directs us, according to the second table, to love and serve one another. This God wants us to learn on the Sabbath day. Hence it must also follow that we are not desecrating the Sabbath day by such good works as these.

Christ tells the Pharisees: You are incompetent teachers, because you call doing good a breaking of the Sabbath. What is mostly preached on the Sabbath day is that we should love one another. And what is love? It is certainly not a mere thinking of each other, but a heartfelt kindness, which prompts us to comfort, admonish, and help one another by words and deeds, and to confer benefits according to the need of body and soul. So also St. John says, 1 John 3: "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." This the Lord commands you,

especially on the Sabbath day; yea more, God has appointed the Sabbath day for the very purpose, that you should hear and learn how to be kind to your neighbor in words and be helpful in deeds, as the circumstances may require.

Thus the Lord reprimands the false saints, who perverted the Word of God, giving it a wrong meaning, and boasted of their keeping the Sabbath, whilst they had no charity and would not even give their naked neighbor a shirt or a pair of shoes. Rogues are they that thus pervert the Word of God. For wherever the Word of God commands and says: Love thy neighbor and do him good, they will answer: Oh no, by so doing I might break the Sabbath. They thus teach false doctrine and pervert the command of God. On the Sabbath especially we are taught how to love our neighbor, how to take care of him, and how to assist him in all things pertaining to the welfare of his soul and body, as is seen from the example of which the Lord here speaks. Is it not a shame, says He, if an ox or an ass fall into a pit and thou wilt not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day? If then it is no sin to help a beast, it would be madness to forbid loving and helping a poor man on the Sabbath day.

Thus it must always be the case that those who undertake to criticize and to teach the Lord Jesus, shall be caught in their own snare and expose themselves as great fools, as was the case with the Pharisees who supposed Him to be caught in either case, whether He would heal the man with dropsy or not.

But the Lord gives them an answer by which they are put to shame, so that they will not make any further effort. He tells them: , Ye hypocrites, you are the very men that desecrate and break the Sabbath. The wrong which ye try to find in me, ye find in yourselves. To sanctify the Sabbath day means to hear God's Word, to do good works, to love your neighbor and to assist him in every need, to be obedient, merciful, kind, helpful with advice and consolation, to give meat and drink, and so forth. This is to be done on the Sabbath day, and is called true worship. All other sham service God does not need; neither does He want bellowing in the Church all day long, as the Papists do. But He wants us to hear His Word and to live and do according to that Word.

The beautiful passage of the prophet Hosea is applicable here: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offering.” And what is the knowledge of God? Nothing else but to hear His Word; because without this Word no one could know anything of God. But when the Word is brought, it says: I am the Lord thy God; I have given my Son into death for thee, and have accepted thee in holy Baptism, and so forth. By the Word of God we learn to know Him to be gracious and merciful, which could never be known or learned by reason. Therefore, because we derive a knowledge of God through the Word, it is indeed a service of God and sanctifying the Sabbath, when we hear the Word of God and live and do in accordance with it. This the wicked hypocrites and Pharisees neglect; they do not hear the Word of God, nor do they keep it; and still they would not bear the name of Sabbath breakers.

This also is the case with the Papists. Kings and dignitaries, who oppose the Word, hear mass every day. This is their high worship which they are not willing to dispense with a single day. But a sermon they do not hear in a month, nay, not in half a year, or even in a whole year. And even if they do hear a sermon they do not hear the Scriptures or the true Word of God, but mere human vanities and lies. This is the worship by which they imagine that they sanctify the holy day, which however cannot be done except by hearing the Word of God and by doing the good works which are pointed out and commanded in that Word.

Therefore to Christians every day should be a Sabbath. For every day we should hear and practice God’s Word. Yet, Sunday has been appointed for the people that every one may hear or learn God’s Word. The other six days common people have to labor and earn their daily bread. This God is pleased to see, because He has commanded us to labor. But the seventh day He wants us to keep holy and not to labor, so that no one may be disturbed in exercising himself in God’s Word and work, and to do not what pertains to temporal affairs, but what God requires in His Word.

This is the first point of our Gospel-lesson. From it every one should learn, that it is serving God and sanctifying the Sabbath day when we hear the Word of God and keep it. Therefore when you go to church, or earnestly read the Gospel, you are serving God and pleasing Him more than you could by sacrifices or so-called holiness, as the prophet Hosea says.

The other point teaches of humility. For the Lord Himself explains the parable, when He says: “Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” You must learn that this is the case not merely before God, but also before men. All men are naturally opposed to those who are proud. And it must be an exceedingly wicked person that would be opposed to a truly humble and pious man. It is natural for every one to love humility, as we see in the case of the maid, who is willing and obedient and in simplicity of heart does what is commanded. In such cases the heart of the mistress is easily gained, so that it cannot be against her. It is natural, we say, to be pleased with people of true humility.

And again, no one can be pleased with people who exalt themselves. As soon as parents find a child observant to be proud and disobedient, which two faults are always combined, and hear them say: I do not need to do what you tell me, it is high time to correct and humble them or to send them away. This is done also by the civil government. Those who are proud and do not want to be obedient are taught by the scaffold or sword at the hands of the sheriff.

And how does it come that every one dislikes those who exalt themselves? It is because God so ordains it in His Word, which tells us that He will help to humble those who are high-minded and proud, as is seen in all the callings of men. Those who were rich, learned, wise, beautiful, strong and powerful, if they became proud and did not want to humble themselves, have been abased by God Himself; as is said, “God resisteth the proud.” Whoever has such an opponent shall not succeed; he must fall, and no power on earth can save him.

But those who are humble gain favor with God and man; upon them God and the holy angels, and also men, will look with pleasure as upon a jewel. And success and the blessing of God will follow, as is seen, for instance, in the experience of the son of poor parents. These could not give him a penny, and yet he became great and renowned, so that, even princes and potentates admired his talents and skill. Whence does that come? Certainly from God. He cannot be prevented from exalting the humble and from showing grace and mercy. Thus it is said in the 113th Psalm: “Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth! He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him

with princes of his people.” This God does with the humble. But the proud, who continually exalt themselves, He meets in His wrath and will not rest until they are abased altogether.

This should induce us to be humble and children and domestics to be obedient. God wants me to do what I am told, and not to be proud, but humble. This I will do, and not be grieved on account of my humble calling. For I know, if I am faithful, God will not keep me down, but exalt me in due time.

This was the case with king Saul. He was obedient to his father, took care of his asses, and considered himself the lowest in the land of the Benjamites. To him God sent the prophet to anoint him king of Israel. Because he was not proud, but humble, God poured upon him a great measure of divine grace and mercy.

But what happened afterwards? When Saul had been made king, he exalted himself and became proud, and did not care for God nor His Word. Therefore, in like manner as God at first had exalted him, He afterwards abased him, so that out of despair he committed suicide and his house was exterminated. Again, David was a fine, strong, and learned youth. But in humility he did not exalt himself because of his good qualities. He continued to be a shepherd and was obedient to his father until Samuel came to make him king. And history tells us, that David had seven brothers who all were high-minded and proud and despised their younger brother David. But God spoke to Samuel concerning David, that he should make him king, saying: “Arise, anoint him: for this is he.” And David, after God had exalted him, continued to be humble, else, if he had exalted himself, God would have abased him, as he had abased Saul. But because he continues to be humble, though he is dethroned for a while, he is reinstated and is highly honored of God, who even promises that Christ shall come out of his seed.

All of this is written and preached unto us for the purpose of teaching us humility and of guarding us against pride, so that we may not, like a wicked maid-servant, ask: Who can be confined to the kitchen, to washing and sweeping always? I am not obliged to submit to others, and so forth. Beware; if you exalt yourself, God will surely be against you. He cannot and will not suffer pride and haughtiness, as we see every day. And what do

you think to be the reason, that we find so much misery in the world everywhere, and so many coarse, awkward and unfortunate men and women. Nothing else but this, that when they are young they want to walk in pride and not do what they are commanded. Hence the Lord suffers them to rove about like swine and never to learn any thing useful. For so it has been decreed: He that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he only that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Thanks and praise be unto God for these teachings. May He grant us grace to follow them, for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

Eighteenth Sunday After Trinity.

Man. 22:34-46.

But when the Pharisees had heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is He? They say unto Him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on my right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool? If David then call Him Lord, how is He His son? And no man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions.

In the Gospel for today we have two chief parts. The first treats of the scribe who asks which is the great commandment in the law; the other, of Christ's question in turn to the Pharisees, what they think of Christ, inasmuch as David in spirit called Him Lord.

The first question shows that the Jews had fallen into such great blindness as to have forgotten the ten commandments, which are known even by little children, for which reason even small children should be able to answer such a question.

The first and greatest commandment reads: Thou shalt have no other gods before me. But the scribes and Pharisees had departed from this and

fallen so deeply into error that when disputing of this commandment some would say, that it requires sacrifice; others, that alms-giving is meant; and still others, that it refers to fasting, special modes of dressing, etc. As we see, this is the result when people begin to differ from the commandments of God and His Word and under take to perform Works dictated by man's own thoughts and in opposition to God's Word. This is the case also with our monks and nuns, who have entered the cloister to practice obedience and have no property. By so doing they have lost and forgotten what faith and love are, and still extol the monastic life as a state of perfection.

But now, thank God, a child ten years old knows better than all monks and nuns what a state of perfection is. Because monks and nuns only think of their self-invented monastic life. A Christian will say: To be perfect means to fear and love God and to do all possible good to one's neighbor. For God has commanded nothing else. This, I am sure, no monk can say; else they would drop their own foolish endeavors and begin to be truly obedient to the ten commandments.

Such want of reason or blindness will follow if people are set upon external works which have great pomp and show, such as keeping special days, wearing special dress, and not eating and drinking what other people eat and drink. This glitters and attracts notice. Yet they lose sight of the highest works and commandments, to love God and to do good to their neighbors. This we here see from the scribes and Pharisees, who for this reason ask about the greatest commandment in the law, because they are not agreed among themselves, one considering this to be the best thing and another that.

This instance, therefore, is a suitable warning, because these people of high standing were blind and did not know which is the greatest or the least of the commandments, though they were teachers to instruct others about true worship and to set them a good example. Such are our crazy monks and priests still. Ask any of them about good works, and what you must do to be saved, and he will not point you to the ten commandments, but he will tell you to become a monk, to hear masses, to make pilgrimages to the saints, to fast, etc.

But this is drawing away from the ten commandments and the true way, and directing people to the byways, into the fool's paradise, which is the

final reward for doctrines of men imposing works which God has not commanded. Thus people become so blinded that they no longer see the ten commandments, but lose them entirely; else one would be sharp enough to say: What God has commanded and enjoined, that is the greatest. Scribes and Pharisees, priests, monks and nuns. however, cannot do this.

Therefore we must guard against such error and shun our own inventions; we must not regard the Catechism as a doctrine of little importance when we are to teach people what to do. For there we hear that we should love God and to have no other gods before Him; that is, we should not love or esteem anything more than God and His Word, but rather lose and suffer everything. If you do this you are in the highest order.

Yea, they say, this may be done by common Christians, but I wish to do something extra. A common Christian does not get up at night to pray, but I will get up for the morning service. He eats meat, I will eat fish. He wears ordinary clothing, but I will dress in a peculiar fashion, etc. These blind people finally get so absorbed in their own inventions that they forget altogether the ten commandments. Therefore it is an important doctrine when the Lord here says that the greatest of all commandments is to love God, and that the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all that we are to preach and teach about good works. From this fountain all is to flow and to it all is to return. For thus it is concluded: If you wish to serve God, you cannot do it in any other way than by loving God and your fellow-men.

This doctrine will at the last day call forth a severe judgment. For what has been done in popedom every one knows. Those who wished to serve God did not think of the ten commandments, but some became monks, others ran to Rome or St. James, others again worshiped this or that saint and served him by fasting, keeping holidays, etc. All this was then called divine worship.

“To serve,” however, means to do what has been commanded; from which it follows, that who ever will serve God aright must do what God has commanded, and not what seems good to him. And how does God ask us to serve Him? Here it is written. If you would serve God, you need not travel far to do it, nor spend much money in doing it. Love God and your neighbor. God could not make His service more convenient and less

expensive than by considering the love shown to your neighbors and the good done them as a service rendered to Himself. It is indeed a singular doctrine that doing good to your neighbor should be a worship of God as though it were done unto Him.

This doctrine, I say, will make a great stir at the last day. "The wicked," Christ says, "will then ask: Lord, when saw we thee an hungered or athirst? But Christ will answer them and say: Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me." Thus it is certain that if you give a shirt, coat, or a drink of cold water to a poor Christian, it shall be considered as given to Christ Himself. And no one is allowed here to make any distinction.

Is it not a work of the devil that we fail to improve such opportunity and to consider that we might so easily serve God, and yet will not do it? We think that we would run after Christ and bring to Him all that we have, if we only knew where He is to be found. But why do we entertain such thoughts? Do we not find it stated here, that the second command is like unto the first? Then it certainly must follow that whatever we do unto our neighbor God will gladly consider as done unto Him.

But you may say, our Lord God is in heaven. That makes no difference; He also is here upon earth. Therefore, if you see a Christian suffer, you should know that Christ is suffering and is in need of your help. For He Himself tells us that, at the last day, He will complain of us for having permitted Him to suffer hunger and thirst.

A lamentable fact it is to have the doctrine so plain and yet to disregard it as though there were no God to whom we might render service every day and every hour. Our disobedience can never be justified by saying that we did not know any better. For here it is written: "The second is like unto the first." Whoever therefore loves his neighbor, loves God. For this reason also the judgment, at the last day, will read: If you had served your neighbor, you would have served me and I would have rewarded you richly. But if I had depended on you, I would have had to suffer and to perish. Such a judgment we should endeavor to avoid, for it will be followed by eternal damnation.

In the papacy it was a common thing for an old knight, warrior, judge, and the like, who imagined that they were in a damnable estate, to say: I

have thus far served the world, but now I will begin to serve God. Many of them would run into cloisters and become monks or hermits. But it was a diabolical deception. For whoever wants to serve God should not hide himself in a secluded corner, but remain among the people and serve them by any means in his power, and be assured that by so doing he is serving God, who has commanded it, and said: "The second commandment is like unto the first." By leading the life of a monk He is not served; He has commanded nothing of the kind; it is in opposition to love and true worship, of which the Lord here speaks.

This was the case also with the Jews. They did all kinds of evil to their neighbors, and thought that if they only sacrificed plenty of cows and calves, all would be right. But what does the Lord say in the 50th Psalm? "I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, no he-goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." He also says in other portions of Scripture that He does not need their gold, temple, and other things, but that if they would serve Him, He directs them to their neighbors. You have wife, children, domestics, neighbors, magistrates and lords, and all kinds of estates; they require all your attention; by doing your duty toward them you serve me. If thy child will not be good and obedient, get the rod at once and apply it faithfully. If thy domestics do wrong, punish them or send them away. If thy neighbor is poor, distressed or sick, help, serve, and comfort him; be subject and obedient to your ruler, and you have done it unto me.

It is indeed to be regretted that we will not take this to heart. Whatever we have done wrong against God, He will not lay to our charge, but forgive; but He wants us to serve our neighbor and will count that service as being done unto Him, and will besides reward us richly. Whoever does not know the world and its ways, that it regards neither God's promises nor His threatenings, might here learn to know it. For what else do people do, both in city and country, than boldly smite the Lord God in the face, maltreat Him and tread Him under foot? For every one only endeavors to get rich and to increase his goods, whilst his neighbor may fare as he will, die or perish.

Whoever could believe that what he does for his neighbor, he does for God, would be amazed at such unfaithfulness of the world. But scarcely

anyone believes it to be true, as the Lord says, Matt. 25, that the wicked will say at the last day: “Lord when have we seen Thee an hungered or thirsty?” Yet it will do them no good. For as the Lord here says: “The other commandment is like unto the first,” so Christ will then also say: “Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not unto me.”

This is the first lesson of the Gospel for today. God grant that we may take it to heart. For if every one would consider the service he renders unto his neighbor as being rendered unto God, the whole world would be full of God’s service. A man-servant in the stable, a maid-servant in the kitchen, a boy in school — all would be servants of God if they would do with cheerfulness all that father and mother, master and mistress, have commanded them to do. Thus every house would be a real church, in which God alone would be worshiped. But nobody will take it to heart, nobody will serve his neighbor. Everybody will only serve himself and only look to his own interest. And because the world does not esteem the love of our neighbor, and does not serve God by exercising such love, it serves only the devil. Such a course however will have an evil ending. The Lord our God can never be pleased by it; He has given an opportunity to everybody to serve Him, and every one may turn his house and every room of it into a golden church, adorned with emeralds and pearls, yet we neglect His service shamefully and rather serve the devil than God.

Then learn to understand that whoever serves his neighbor for his good, is not merely serving his neighbor, but also God in heaven Himself. For here it is written that God will consider such service as rendered unto Him. Else Christ would not say: “The second commandment is like unto the first.” Whoever therefore cannot be induced to build up a kingdom of heaven on earth and to make a house of God or a church out of his own house or estate, may fare his own way. For as you might prepare for yourself a paradise and heaven by serving your neighbor, which is serving God in heaven, you do prepare for yourself by not serving your neighbor, a hell upon earth; because you serve the devil who belongs to hell. And it is all the same whether you now see or feel it or not. The time will come when you shall feel it very perceptibly, and when you shall mourn over your self and your great disobedience. Hence it is necessary for us to learn always to practice love toward our neighbors. For this purpose God has given us

mouth, eyes, hands, feet, money, goods, reason, and other blessings, in order that we may comply with His command and to continue in His service.

This lesson concerning the love of God and our neighbor then pertains to the present life here on earth, whilst the other lesson, from the question whose son Christ is, is given that we might learn how, after this life, to attain a better life which is eternal. We will not get to heaven by knowing how to love God and our neighbor, though we show such love in the best way possible by our works. This was the mistake of the Pharisees. They thought that if they had Moses or the law they would not need anything else. But Christ informs us here that such thoughts avail nothing for eternal life. We have to aspire to higher things; we must learn to know who Christ is and whose Son He is. The Pharisees knew very well that He was to be the son of David. But such knowledge Christ declares here to be insufficient; because if Christ were nothing more than the son of David He would have but a temporary kingdom and would have to die like David. But He has an eternal kingdom, and David in spirit calls Him Lord. How then does that agree, that Christ should be a son of David and at the same time his Lord?

This is the question which the Pharisees could not answer and which no Jew can answer to this day. In this question we hear nothing about our neighbor and about love or good works; its sole purpose is that we may learn whose son Christ is. Whoever knows this shall not miss the way to eternal life. It is not enough for eternal life to know the law and what we shall do. The reason is that we fail in doing it. And such doing will be slow work. Hence we must, in addition, learn to know what Christ is. The Lord therefore puts the question in such a form and asks the Pharisees to tell Him whose son Christ is, who, being the son of David after the flesh, yet is called by David not his son, but his Lord, and that such a Lord as sitteth at the right hand of God and whose enemies God has made His footstool.

By such a question the Lord wants to awaken the Jews and all of us, that we may exalt Christ and behold Him with other eyes than such as would behold a mere son of David. He also is David's Lord; that is, He is not merely man, but also true God, born of the Father from eternity. If He were not more than a man and merely David's son, David would not call Him his Lord. David was one of the greatest saints and the most learned king; and yet he calls Christ, who was his son, his Lord. As though he would say and

openly confess: O my Son, Thou art far above me. I am also a king and am called His father, and yet He is my Lord, and such a Lord as is seated at the right hand of God, and by God's command rules over all His enemies. For since He is a man we can easily perceive what enemies He has, namely the devil and death, as St. Paul also draws the conclusion from this Psalm in 1 Cor. 15. If then death and the devil are to be trod under foot by this Son of David as their Lord, it must follow that this Son of David must be endowed with divine power and omnipotence, else He could not, as little as other men, subdue death and the devil.

Thus the Lord leads us the true way to eternal life. The law is a very good, useful and necessary doctrine. It tells us what to do in order to please God, to serve Him, and to escape the punishment of sin. Such doctrine is certainly profitable for this life unto a fine outward training in external works, and thus confers temporal blessings. And yet, if we wish to pass from this temporal life into eternal life, the doctrine of the law will do us no good; because we cannot obtain life, unless we are cleansed from all sins. Though the law serves and has been given to the end that we may commit less sin, yet sin itself is not removed by it. Therefore, besides the law we must have another doctrine which teaches us how we may become free from sin. For as we cannot keep the law perfectly, it serves to give us an evil conscience and, on account of sin, to excite fear of God's wrath and judgment.

Against such misery of conscience, caused by the law, this question would help you, that you may learn to know what Christ is and what He has done. Christ Himself says that He is not merely David's son, as the Jews held Him to be, but also David's Lord, that is, the eternal and righteous God. But what does He do? He made Himself of no reputation, as St. Paul says, and became man, and died on the cross. And why? Because He is the Lamb of God, that is, the sacrifice which God had ordained to be offered up for the sins of the world. And after having died He arises, on the third day, from the dead to eternal life, and sitteth at the right hand of God. This we should learn of Christ and take it to heart. Who ever has learned this art is saved; whoever has not learned it, must perish in sin and death. The reason is that we are all sinners, and the law does not deliver us from sin, but accuses us before God and very clearly points out our sins. There we are fast and can go neither forward nor backward. In sins we are conceived and

born; and the longer we live the more our sins will grow and increase. Sin is not laid upon us like other burdens which we may lay off or throw aside. It pervades all our members and leaves us no rest. This we ourselves have to confess, if we will but open our eyes and examine our hearts.

The only remedy and help for us is that we learn to know who Christ is. For if you know, in the first place, who He is, and afterwards hear what He does, you are safe. For if you feel that you are a poor sinner who has sinned much against the will of God, look to Jesus. God sends this Christ to suffer and to pay for sinners. And why will you trouble yourselves about a debt which is assumed by so rich a Lord, who has already adjusted it? Therefore it all depends on this that you have full confidence in such sufferings and death.

Death is sure to us all; no one can escape and save himself from it, be he ever so powerful, strong, rich, wise, and holy. But where does death come from? Death is the wages of sin, Rom. 6. Now you have heard how we may obtain forgiveness of sins; nowhere else but in Christ, who has died for us. Christ has died, but He did not continue in death, but arose again. This is an evidence that He is Lord even over death.

And as you have forgiveness of sins through Him, so you may also hope to have through Him eternal life, so that He will in the last day also raise you up bodily and give you eternal salvation. This is what we call truly to know Christ and to know whose Son He is, namely the son of David. For He is man. And yet He is also the Lord of David, sitting at the right hand of God and making His enemies, such as sin, death and hell, His footstool. Whoever therefore needs deliverance from such enemies, should not apply to Moses, to the law, to his own works or piety, but to Christ, who is both the Son and the Lord of David, and he shall be sure to find it.

The shameful Pharisees are ignorant of this; therefore they do not regard the Lord Jesus. They are content to know from the law how to love God and their neighbor, although it is impossible to know God, much less to love Him, without knowing Christ; as Christ says, Matt. 11: "No man knoweth the Father save the Son and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him."

This is also a reason why the Lord asks this question just now; as though He would say: You know that it is your duty to love God, but you will never truly love God with all your heart, with all your mind, unless you know

Christ and know also who He is. How else would you know what grace and mercy God has manifested. It is no small thing that God has created us and has given us life and being and all things. But all this will serve us but for a little while, during our life here on earth.

But the riches and inestimable goodness and grace of God is manifested in this, that He spared not His only begotten Son, but gave Him into death on the cross for us, that we might be delivered from sin and live forever. This is an eternal, unbounded, unfathomable love and grace, which no man can know unless he knows Christ; therefore he will never be able, without Him, truly to love God.

Thus we see what the scribes and Pharisees gain by their efforts and the questions they ask. Nothing whatever, except that Christ shows them publicly, and in the presence of all, that they can talk much about the love of God, but that there is not a spark of it in their hearts, because they know not Christ. But if they do not love God, who has favored them with so much grace and such great gifts, how will or shall they love their neighbor, who is in need of their help and can on account of his poverty do them no favor.

Therefore let us learn to appreciate this doctrine and thank God from all our heart that He has delivered us from the great blindness which was upon us in the papacy and in which the Jews are still, but that we have now the pure doctrine concerning Christ, by which alone we know how to be cleansed from sins and to be saved, and by which also we receive the Holy Ghost, who through such people prompts us to begin loving God and our neighbors indeed and with our hearts.

May the Lord Jesus grant this to us all. Amen.

Nineteenth Sunday After Trinity.

Matt. 9:1-8.

And He entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into His own city. And, behold, they brought to Him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy: Son, be of good cheer: thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith He to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go, unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marveled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.

This Gospel teaches us to note particularly the good tidings which God has granted us, that we may here on earth say to each other, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," so that with the people here spoken of we may marvel and glorify God, Which had given such power unto men. And it is indeed a great power that one Christian may say to another: My brother, be of good cheer, you have a gracious God; only believe the assurance which I give you in Christ's name and it is as certain as if God Himself had said to you, Thy sins are forgiven thee. Such power, as we hear, originated in Christ and is now given unto men, especially to those who are in office and are commanded to preach the Gospel, that is, repentance and forgiveness of sins, in Jesus' name. Other Christians, although they are not in that office, also have the command, in case of necessity, to comfort you when you are troubled on account of your sins, and to say: Why are you troubled? I, as a Christian, assure you that you are wronging yourself; God is not unmerciful unto you. You are for Christ's sake to put all your trust in His grace. You are

to comfort yourself as surely with these words as if Christ spake them in person from heaven.

All now depends on this, that you accept such assurance and hold it to be true that God is merciful unto you for Christ's sake. This we here learn from the man sick with the palsy. In the first place, the Lord admonishes him to believe, saying: Son, be of good cheer, and doubt not, thy sins are forgiven thee. As soon as the palsied man believed these words his sins were really forgiven.

Thus we come into possession of the forgiveness of sins in our day also, when the servant of the Church, or any other Christian, assures you: God is not angry with you, do not you be angry with Him, because He has, for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, forgiven you all your sins. You should therefore, with all confidence, trust in this assurance and suffer yourself to be torn to pieces rather than to doubt it. For if you doubt, the absolution, even if it were pronounced over you orally by God and His holy angels, would profit you nothing.

Where there is no faith, there God is considered a liar, as though He did not tell us the truth and would not fulfill His promises. May God in mercy graciously deliver us from such unbelief and sin, although the devil is a real expert in leading people to consider God a liar and to distrust His promises.

But where the heart believes God is honored with the glory which is most pleasing to Him. For then we regard Him to be true, as a Lord who cannot lie, though He spake of things which seem to be altogether impossible. Hence the Lord is especially pleased with the people who trusted in Him, that He would help the man with a palsy. He therefore very kindly says: My son, you are sick; the devil has caused your palsy, and God has, on account of your sins, given him permission to do so; therefore you have a troubled conscience and begin to think that God is angry and do not know how to help yourself. When God's visitation is heavily felt, it is natural to be greatly troubled. But, my son, do not give way to such thoughts of your heart, so as to ask: What does God care for me? And who knows whether He will be gracious unto me? and what am I before God? Do not look upon your disease but listen when I tell you, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." Therefore draw the conclusion: Palsy or no palsy, my sins

are forgiven me; in this faith neither palsy nor any other disease shall disturb me.

Thus the Word and faith must be together and neither can exist without the other. He that believes without the Word, has the faith of Turks and Jews, who also say that God is gracious and merciful; but they have not the promise and in fact do not believe that God is gracious unto them and forgives them their sins. For God will not be gracious outside of Christ. A Christian therefore must believe that God is gracious, not merely to others or to a few favored persons, but to him in particular, forgiving his sins for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, the Mediator. And again, whoever has the Word and no faith, is not benefited by it. Therefore the Word and faith must be joined together, like hus band and wife, and not be put asunder.

A fanatic believes that the day of judgment will come in four weeks. Such a belief is nothing but a lie, for it does not rest on the Word. A Turk expects to enjoy the salvation of Mohammed, but his expectations are false, as they have no Word to rest upon. So the pope believes that a Christian must be raised to heaven by his works, but this is a false faith, for the Word and promise is wanting. Thus a person may have a faith, but if the Word is wanting it is a false faith and a delusion which amounts to nothing.

For us Christians the Word is not wanting. By the grace of God we have it full and pure. But we lack faith that holds to the Word, whilst those who have not the Word believe more firmly. The devil and our innate depravity draw us away from the word of truth and induce us rather to believe the untruth. Therefore it is difficult, even when we are in possession of the Word, to guard against unbelief. Our reason, flesh and blood, will not trust in the Word; they want to see, feel and touch what is to be believed. This is the work of the bad spirit; he causes sluggishness everywhere, else we would be more cheerful and confident. Be assured, if we could truly and firmly believe what Christ says to the paralytic, and what he has said to you and me in baptism, in the words of absolution and in daily public preaching, that we have no reason to fear God's wrath and displeasure, we would leap for joy. Would not all things then become to us pure sugar, gold and eternal life? But the fact that such is not the case, is an evidence, that the old Adam and the devil are always engaged in keeping us from faith and the Word.

Therefore learn that both must be together. You must have the Word and lean in faith upon that Word and as much as possible banish all doubts. Then you shall have all that the Word promises and all that is needed for both soul and body. Those who are without the Word find it easy to believe, because it is natural to believe falsehoods, and the heart is more inclined to them.

For this reason also the pope and his adherents believe very strongly in masses, in the merits of saints, in intercessions, in monastic vows, in singing, in fasting, etc. But this is a false and deceptive faith, and they, if the expression may be allowed, are prostitutes and knaves. The heart is a strumpet, the false faith is a knave. But we, who, thank God, have the pure and holy brides, since the Word is pure and holy, cannot believe so firmly, though we should stoutly believe. But they should not be firm in their faith, because they have no Word. It is the fault of the devil and our old Adam, that we, on account of our natural depravity, have been led away from the Word and the truth to believe lies.

So we should learn from our Gospel-lesson that, in the first place, we must have the Word, and then secondly, that we should firmly believe it. For then it will prove itself to be the power of God, by which we have forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, and help and comfort here and hereafter. Wherever the Word is not, people may also have faith, but it is a faith like that of the fanatics, Anabaptists, Turks, Jews and Papists. It is a faith without the Word, such as is inborn because of the fall of Adam, that is, a lying faith to which we by nature can cling more firmly than to the Word of God.

After our dear Savior had been thus teaching the man sick of the palsy and had forgiven him his sins, certain of the scribes said within themselves: This man blasphemeth, because he forgives sins. This also is an important point, to which we should give earnest heed. All fanatics and heretics, as we see, are in error and do not understand how sins are forgiven. Ask the pope and all his dignitaries concerning the effect of absolution, and they will not be able to answer. The doctrine upon which the whole papacy rests is this, that grace is infused into man by a secret power, and whoever would obtain it must be penitent, confess, and render satisfaction.

But when they are asked concerning the use of absolution and the office of the keys, they will tell you that these are an external order which is observed in the churches. They do not make forgiveness of sins dependent on the Word and faith, on which alone they must depend, but on contrition, confession and satisfaction. This however is a wicked doctrine, by which the poor people are deceived and misled.

Thus also the Anabaptists say: How should Baptism cause forgiveness of sins? it is a mere handful of water. If we are to be cleansed from sins, it must be done by the Spirit; water cannot do it. They separate forgiveness of sins from the Word and do not believe, as the pious people in our text say, that such power has been given unto men.

Also the errorists concerning the Sacrament say: In the Sacrament of the altar we have mere bread and wine; therefore forgiveness of sins can not be obtained by it; this must be granted by the Spirit, the flesh profiteth nothing. In short, no heretic, no priest nor monk, has been able to see that forgiveness of sins is a power given unto men, as stated in our text.

Learn then to speak thus of the matter: It is true, and I know and confess, that God alone can forgive sins. But I must know also by what signs I may ascertain that my sins are forgiven or what the means are by which my sins are forgiven. The Holy Scriptures teach me, and all Christians, that if I desire forgiveness of sins I must not sit down in a corner and say: My God, forgive me my sins; and then wait for an angel to come from heaven to tell me: Thy sins are forgiven thee. For God has promised to come Himself and assure me of the forgiveness of my sin.

This is done, in the first place, in holy Baptism. There we have the command to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. And in addition to this command we have the promise: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

But you say, Baptism is just water. That is true, but it is not mere water; God's Word is with it. Again, when you go to your pastor, who has the special office to this end, or to any other Christian, and ask for comfort and absolution, and he tells you: In God's stead I declare unto you the forgiveness of all your sins through Christ, you may be sure that your sins are really forgiven through such external word; for Baptism and the Word will not deceive you.

This doctrine has not been preached in the papacy and is not taught by any papistic priest to this day. Therefore thank God for this grace, and learn that God will forgive sins. But how? In no other way than we here read, “that He has given such power unto men.” So Christ here makes use of this power, and commands that it henceforth be used in the churches to the end of time, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins be preached in His name.

Thus every one should seek forgiveness of sins among men, and nowhere else. Here alone it can be found; for the Lord Jesus promises, Matt. 18: “Verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall loose here on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” And again, John 20: “Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.” God will not permit every one to build a flight of steps or a ladder of his own into heaven; that He will attend to Himself.

Therefore, if you would have forgiveness of sins, go and be baptized, if you are not baptized already. And if you are baptized, remember the promises of God then made, and be not unbelieving. Again, go and be reconciled to your neighbor, and then come and ask for absolution. And when you hear the assurance of the forgiveness of your sins in Christ’s name, believe it and you will truly have it. Then go also to the holy Sacrament and receive the body and blood of Christ. Do all this to the end that you may be certain that this precious treasure is meant for you and is yours for your enjoyment.

We should therefore not despise Baptism, Absolution, the preaching of the Gospel and the Sacrament of the Altar, but use them for the purpose of seeking and finding forgiveness of sins thereby. For this purpose God has called your pastor, your parents, and every Christian around you, and has put His Word into their mouths, that you may receive comfort and forgiveness of sins through them. And though the words of absolution are spoken by them, it is not their word, but the Word of God. Hence we ought not to despise it, but firmly rely on it.

Therefore when a servant of the Church baptizes a child, after the command of Christ, you hear a man speak, who in his person is a sinner like yourself, yet he is acting according to the command of God. And when he says: I baptize thee in the name of the Father, etc. then hear and receive

these words as though God had spoken them. So when your sins are forgiven in absolution, do not doubt that God Himself has done it. He Himself decides then and there that you shall be loosed from your sins.

To be well informed concerning these things is of great importance, because the shameless and vexatious sectaries will continue to contend and to cry: Water is water. This they do not need to teach us; we know it quite well. But this they do not know, that the Word of God is connected with such water. For this reason it is no longer mere water, but a divine water, which is not given by the servant of the Church of himself, but at the command of God, in order that we may be relieved from the burden of our sins and be born again and received into the kingdom of God.

As now God has given the Word, which is not ours but His, so also He gives us faith in that Word; both are His gifts; not merely the Word, but also faith. Hence forgiveness of sins also is the work of God, although He confers it through men.

Accordingly we are directed to seek forgiveness of sins in the Word which is put in the mouths of men, and in the Sacraments administered by men, and nowhere else, for nowhere else can it be found.

But the works which I perform are far different from the Word and works of God. This every one might understand. How then come the impious Papists to seek forgiveness of sins in their own works? When they come at the day of judgment and present their works and merit, Christ will ask them: But where is my Word? Did I not appoint in my churches Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, Absolution and the preaching of the Gospel, in order that men thereby might receive forgiveness of sins and be assured of my grace? Why did you not make good use of these means of grace? Then you would not have failed; but relying on your works, you shall and must be disappointed.

Therefore, mark well these teachings and learn what forgiveness of sins is, how you can be assured of it, and where you are to seek and find it; namely, that you are to seek it nowhere but in the Christian Church, which has the Word and Sacraments. In these means you shall surely find it, and not in heaven, as the Pharisees think, who accuse the Savior of blasphemy because He forgives sins, which they say no one can do except God. Guard against such errors; rather say: God has enclosed forgiveness of sins in holy

Baptism, in the Lord's Supper and in the Gospel, yea, He has laid it in the mouth of every Christian, when he comforts you and assures you of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, and you should accept and believe all as if you, like the paralytic in the text, had heard these assurances from the mouth of Jesus Himself.

Hence it is a great and dangerous mistake of the sectaries and fanatics to sever the Word from forgiveness of sins. This might be done if it were a word or water of man; but we here have the word and the water of God. Whoever takes this from the people or explains it away, certainly robs them of forgiveness of sin.

Therefore the Anabaptists and other fanatics have lost forgiveness of sin, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Christian Church, and other Christian works, because they reject the Word, which they hear from their neighbor, and do not esteem it any more than the bellowing of a cow. Yea, if God would see proper to speak through a cow, or any other animal, as once He spoke through an ass, we should never despise that word, but recognize it as His Word; why then should we despise it when men speak it at the command and according to the ordinance of God. Though you bear but the voice of men, you nevertheless hear God and receive forgiveness of sins, if you only accept and believe, the Word which you hear.

I have thought proper to refer to this in order that you may be prepared for the errorists and be able to defend yourselves. In popery these teachings are altogether unknown. There it is held and taught, that, if man falls into sin, he is not benefited any more by Baptism; but if he has a desire for the forgiveness of sins, he must confess and do penance for his sins by good works. Thus they teach concerning repentance. And this doctrine the devil does not oppose, because it does him no harm.

It is true, I have reason to repent and to be sorry on account of my sins; but by so doing I do not receive forgiveness. By what means then? Only by this, that I pay attention to the Word and promise and believe; and that, whenever the Lord Jesus speaks to me by His appointed servants or any other Christian, I depend on His Word and not on my penance and sorrow.

But they turn things around; they do not consider the fact that the servants of the Church and other Christians speak at the command of the Lord Jesus; but only behold their own sorrow and repentance. But thus they

lose Christ and all Christ is; and therefore it is impossible for them properly to comfort and to assist a troubled soul; because the Word, by which alone they could help, they have lost, and now point people to their own repentance and piety.

But you learn to speak about forgiveness of sins, and also to teach others, that God speaks to us in Baptism, in the absolution, from the pulpit and in the holy Supper, through the servant of the Church and other Christians, and that we should listen to them and believe them. In this way we find forgiveness of sins, which had been altogether suppressed in the papacy. Not a letter of it is written in all the bulls of the pope. They only point to sorrow, as though forgiveness of sins depended upon that. May this suffice concerning the words, that God has given power unto men to forgive sins. Let us now refer briefly to the narrative in our text.

The man sick of the palsy is a picture of every sinner. It is the nature of this disease, that the person afflicted with it has no use of his limbs; it is impossible for him to draw in a foot or a hand; they rather will stretch out the more an effort is made to draw them in. Hence Aristotle compares such a man, in his Ethics, with the rude and impudent youth who can neither be tamed nor managed.

But the most suitable interpretation of this disease is to refer it to the self-righteous. For the more these endeavor to approach God and to reconcile Him, the further they are removed from Him; and when they imagine that they do the very best, they are doing the worst, because they have no faith.

Whoever, therefore, wishes to be delivered from this disease, let him come to Christ; He will help in a marvelous way, by merely saying: "My son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee." Such words strengthen joints and members, so that they may again bear and support each other. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there the wrath and punishment of God must vanish, and He is no longer displeased with our works. Yea, because sin has been removed, we are prepared to perform good works indeed.

This the Lord wants to teach by referring to the man sick with the palsy. This man was lying prostrated on his bed, stretching forth hand and foot after the nature of the disease. But when Christ commands him to arise, he arises, hale and hearty. And whilst before he had been carried on the bed, he

now carries his bed and goes to his house. This the Lord wishes us to notice and to take for a pledge that He has power on earth to forgive sins.

The reason that He says “upon earth,” is, that He does not want us to gaze to heaven for the forgiveness of sins, as the pope teaches, nor hope, after death and in purgatory, to be delivered by the works and merit of others. For here it is written, that forgiveness of sins is a “power given unto men on earth,” and that this power is applied when we baptize, administer the Sacrament, absolve, and preach from the pulpit. And it is resolved that whatsoever is loosed on earth, is also loosed in heaven; and again, whatsoever is bound (that is, excluded from the Word and Sacraments), is also bound in heaven.

This power, by which we bind or loose, does not, interfere with the honor of God, nor are we to be made gods thereby, as is said by silly people. For we have nothing more than the office, and this does not reach any farther than your faith. If you believe, you have it; if you do not believe, you have nothing. Hence God has united us by this office. If one Christian cheers and comforts the other, it is the latter’s duty to believe the word when spoken to him in its purity and accept forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake. This is the true road to God and the forgiveness of sins. Whoever is led this road will die a happy Christian.

But those who die according to the doctrines of the pope, depending on the intercession of saints and the merit of other men, will not die a happy death; for he has not the company which God has appointed and sent unto him, that is, he is without the true Word and Absolution. And though he has Baptism, he does not know how to derive comfort from it. This calamity the devil has brought about by popery, and now tries it anew with the fanatics. He cannot endure the Word; it is very offensive to him.

Therefore the pope has done away with the Word and has instituted monastic orders, masses, pilgrimages, indulgence, etc. These the devil can stand very well, because it does him no harm. The Anabaptists also help along by speaking contemptuously of water or of Baptism; and not less the errorists concerning the doctrine of the holy Supper, by maintaining that in the Sacrament there is nothing but bread and wine. All of these have lost the Word; therefore beware of them, and be assured that forgiveness of sin is not to be found except in the Word. And again, this Word is in Baptism, in

the holy Supper, in Absolution, and in the preaching of the Gospel, and therefore they contain forgiveness of sins, no matter what men may say. Wherever the Word is, there faith will follow; and the limbs of the man sick with palsy will be well and straight. But without the Word the disease will continue, and it is impossible to arise and be well.

This I desired to say, at some length, because the pope and the shameless separatists are doing a great deal of damage, and in order that every one of you may be on your guard. The pope directs neither to the Word nor to the Sacraments. Therefore the separatists have learned to do nothing than to speak contemptuously of the Word and the Sacraments and to cry Spirit! Spirit!! However, we know that the Holy Spirit will not carry on His work except by the Word and the Sacraments. Therefore we cannot do without the Word and the Sacraments, but have reason to value them highly and to consider them our most noble treasure.

May God give us grace that we may abide in purity by this doctrine to our end and be saved. Amen.

Twentieth Sunday After Trinity.

Matt. 22:1—13.

And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants, saying, tell them which are bidden, behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, the wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good; and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment; and he saith unto him, friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In the Gospel lesson for today the kingdom of God is likened unto a marriage a marriage to which guests are invited who do not merely stay away and despise the marriage, but some of them even insult and slay the servants who were sent to inform them of so glorious a marriage and to invite and beg them to come and to partake of it.

Here we should first of all learn to understand the word kingdom of heaven, that it is no kingdom on earth, but a kingdom in heaven, in which God Himself is King. We also call it the Christian Church here upon earth. The Lord uses this parable of the marriage, because the Lord Jesus, the Son of the King, chooses the Church as His bride. Hence we say the kingdom of heaven is also upon earth, and yet is not a worldly and temporal, but a spiritual and eternal kingdom. We Christians here upon earth are already more than half in_ the kingdom of heaven, to wit, as to the soul and spirit, yet it is by faith.

Therefore whenever you hear of the kingdom of heaven, you should not merely gaze up to heaven, but look around you upon the earth and seek it among the people, in the whole world, where the Gospel is taught and Christ is believed in, and the Sacraments are properly used. The “kingdom of heaven,” in plain language, is the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the Gospel and of faith.

For wherever the Gospel is there Christ is also. And where Christ is there is the Holy Ghost also and His kingdom, the true kingdom of heaven. And all who have the Word and Sacraments and believe and remain in Christ by faith are heavenly princes and children of God. All that remains to be done is that God remove the partition which still separates us, that is, that we die, then all will be heaven and salvation.

Learn to understand then, in the first place, that the kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of our Lord Jesus and is to be found wherever the Word and faith are. In this kingdom we have life in hope and are, according to the Word and faith, cleansed from all sin and delivered from death and hell, notwithstanding the old Adam and the corruption of the flesh. The old Adam has not yet been destroyed and the sinful flesh has not been put away; this must yet be done, then there shall be nothing but life, righteousness and salvation.

To such a marriage, Christ says, God by His holy prophets called and invited His people, the Jews, before Christ had come. The main duty of their office was to direct the Jews to wait for this marriage; that is, they assured the people that the Son of God would become man and by His death would pay for the sins of the whole world and by His resurrection destroy the kingdom of the devil and his power; and that afterwards He

would send the Gospel into all the world and have preached to every one forgiveness of sins and eternal life in His name. By such blessed preaching the holy prophets directed the people to wait, be comforted and to hope forgiveness of all sins and eternal life through Christ.

But Christ tells us here: "They would not come." They were like the Jews in the wilderness, when they wished themselves back into Egypt. Afterwards, when the time was near that Christ should come to be heard in His preaching and to be seen in His miracles, He sent other servants. There were John and the disciples of Christ who said: The wedding is ready and all that is needed is that people put aside everything else and clothe and prepare themselves for the wedding. But it was in vain. They made light of it, the Lord says; they went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise, etc.

Miserable are those who, for the sake of their farms or merchandise despise the feast, forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and yet expect to fare well, else they would not miss the feast on account of their farms and merchandise.

But the precious Gospel never fares any better. Whenever it is brought among the people, the scene changes. The world becomes more wicked than before and every one prefers his temporal engagements. In this they are so absorbed that they have no time for anything else. This however has been predicted. Therefore let no one be offended on account of the world, when we see that in town and country all are shamefully given to avarice, pride and self-conceit, and that they treat their pastors who invite them to the marriage-feast, more rudely and roughly than their servants.

This should not offend anyone or lead him to think that people do well when they attend to their farms or merchandise; I will follow their example. By no means. For our God is a kind host who can well afford to wait a while for settlement, yet He does not on that account cancel your bills. Now He suffers people in towns and in the country to have their own way, to despise the Gospel and all faithful admonition and doctrine, to accumulate money, and to hold at unreasonable prices all that one needs, such as wood, grain, butter and eggs. But when today or tomorrow He comes with a pestilence to call them away in large numbers, or with war, when soldiers come and take what they find and give you blows besides, and if they do

not strangle you, they abuse your wife and children and let you witness it and cry, and lament: Ah, God's visitation is heavily upon us: then it will be seen whether God was pleased with your avarice, presumption, and pride. Then it will be said: If you were before given to avarice, pride, vanity and wantonness, and despised my Word, do not complain now; look back upon your past record. You have lived sumptuously long enough; the time has come when you should pay; you must stand good for it with your life. This will be the end of it. It is best therefore to leave off in time and to repent, to which also we are continually admonished by the Word. It would just suit us if we might despise the Word of God and do as we please, without being called to account. Yes, this kind of living people would like to have introduced.

Our lesson continues. Some that were bidden "took His servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them." In these words the Lord has reference especially to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who killed the prophets and at last even the Son of God. But what was the consequence? The king was wroth and sent forth His armies, the Romans. They had to serve Him and to destroy the murderers and to burn their city. The Jews were treated so shamefully that they were sold cheaper than sparrows, thirty for a farthing. A pitiful crying and lamentation was heard, that God in heaven might have been moved. But it had to come to this. They had been carousing long enough and had been taught in vain; they now had to pay for it; now God did not want to hear them either. Beware of this.

We have faults enough without this, on account of which the Lord our God is justly displeased; anger, impatience, avarice, worldly care, incontinence, lewdness, hatred, and other vices, are shameful sins unto death, which prevail in the world everywhere, yet such sins are nothing when compared to the sin of despising the Word of God, which is so great and so common that even avarice, theft, adultery, etc. are not as prevalent. And these sins would be less frequent, if we would love the Word of God as we should. But, alas! we find the contrary; almost everybody, both high and low, disregards the precious Word, and feels an aversion and horror for it. This we observe during preaching; one looks hither and another thither, and among a large gathering there are very few who profit by the preaching of the Word.

And besides the lamentable fact that this sin is so very common, it is a terrible, hellish and devilish sin, because it is not recognized like other sins. Everybody considers it a small thing to hear preaching without paying attention to it; most of people go their way, presuming that wine will taste as well during preaching as at any other time. Most of them are altogether indifferent, nor is anyone troubled in his conscience for putting so low an estimate upon the precious Word. This is not the case as it regards other sins, such as murder, adultery, and theft. These will be followed, sooner or later by regret for having committed such a sin; and nobody will consider it to be right. But for being careless in hearing the Word, yea, for despising and persecuting it, no one feels remorse. Therefore it is such a terrible sin on account of which people and countries must at last be destroyed. Because this sin is not acknowledged, no repentance and amendment of life can follow. This has been experienced by the city of Jerusalem and other kingdoms.

The turn will also come for Germany; the voice of this sin crieth always toward heaven, and will move God to become angry and to say: I have given you my dear Son, my highest and dearest treasure; I endeavored to speak to you and to teach and instruct you for eternal life; but I have none who will listen to me. Therefore I am compelled to punish. As the Lord Himself testifies, John 3: "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." That is as much as to say: I would gladly over look all other sins, but here is the condemnation which causes the ruin of the world. I have sent my Word, but they do not care for it; this displeases me above all. They are very sinful, and I would gladly cleanse them from all sins by my Word, but they will not. Yet, if they will not hear my Word, but hear the word of the devil, I cannot help it; but they must take the consequences.

This has been the experience of the Christians in the East, in the large and beautiful countries which are now subdued by the Turks. Hungary has almost met the same fate. Neither are we Germans and other nations willing to hear the Gospel or to suffer it. Therefore we must hear and endure the sects of the devil, the Anabaptists and abusers of the Sacraments. This is inevitable when the Word of God is despised and not observed, which is the principal and greatest of all sins and which therefore deserves the severest and greatest punishment.

Our Lord God would desire that we should fall down on our knees on account of it, to write it in golden letters, not merely in books, but into the hearts. This the children of the world do not like; they can hardly suffer it to be written in books or have it proclaimed on the pulpit. They prefer the devil in the heart, who also governs them to their satisfaction.

Be warned therefore. God has sufficient reason to be angry and to punish on account of other sins. But the sin of despising His Word and of abusing those who invite us to the heavenly marriage and feast, exceeds all other sins. Let him therefore, who commits this sin learn to be convinced that he is not involved in a trifling sin, but in the most heinous and greatest of all sins, which God can suffer the least and which He has to punish most severely.

Every one is now complaining of the great unfaithfulness and avarice prevailing in the world. This cannot always escape punishment. But to have the Gospel and yet continue to sleep; not to esteem Christian doctrine ourselves nor induce others to embrace it; during the hour of preaching to lounge about the market-place or outside the city, in saloons or gambling houses, this is indeed the greatest of all sins. God will certainly punish it severely by sending errors and factions spirits and by suffering war and other plagues to rage powerfully and to destroy people in great numbers, as has been the case in Greece and other countries. There Mohammed now reigns, who teaches the people to believe in the dirt of the devil, whilst before they had the Word of God, but despised it.

The same has been the case in the papacy. There the doctrine was pure and right at first. But when people acted foolish and unthankful in reference to it, the punishment of God came and we hastened into cloisters and mortified ourselves there in the devil's name. Instead of believing in divine truth we believed in all kinds of gross, hurtful, shameful, and blasphemous lies. The troubles are again coming: (for this sin must be punished bodily and spiritually,) as the devil causes the Arians' and Anabaptists' sacraments to arise in the Church. Why do' the people not adhere to the Word, nor receive it with gratitude?

If you love your own soul's salvation, beware of such sins, but rather honor the Word of God and hear it diligently and cheerfully. If we had no other reason to do so it should be enough for us to know that God has

commanded it, and that by so doing we love and serve Him. It is certainly no small thing to serve such a great Lord; He can reward us bountifully. Every Christian should be engaged in God's-service and argue in this way: Inasmuch as my God and Lord Wants me to hear His Word, I will cheerfully render Him the service, in order that I may glory in the fact that I once served my God for a day or an hour. This should be sufficient to induce us to hold to the Word. But still, there are other and greater reasons. For God promises you saying: If you diligently hear my Word and keep it, you shall be a lord of the devil, so that he will have to flee from you and not come near you. And where my Word is, there I am also. And where I am, there the devil has no room, but must flee.

Moreover, you shall have the benefit of having your sins forgiven and of being prepared for true devotion and obedience. In short, my Word shall bring you on the way to heaven and lead you to eternal life; for I bid you to serve me, but the benefit of this shall mostly be yours. You are obliged, at any rate, to do what I command you. But now I ask of you a service the benefit of which shall be mostly yours, as we experience when after a while we resort again to the ten commandments and the Lord's prayer that we can always learn and discover something which we did not know before.

And one benefit it always affords: the devil will not remain with you, nor harm you. Hence no Christian should consider himself so learned as to know all about the Lord's prayer and the ten commandments. Whenever he is annoyed by such thoughts he should dispel them and say: If I have prayed it today, I will pray it again. You will thus drive away sin and the devil, and render service to God. Otherwise you will displease the Lord your God. And who would be guilty of causing such a great Lord to be angry?

But, alas! most of people value the Word less than nothing. If, therefore, today or tomorrow we are visited by pestilence or war, God will not assist you either; He will suffer you to lament and to cry in vain in the same way as you now suffer Him to cry. As we read Proverbs 1: "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall

not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof," etc.

Thus severely shall this sin be punished. If therefore at some future time, the punishment for such rejection of the Word of God and such in gratitude shall be upon you and your head is bloody, God will laugh at you and say: Serves you right; you have not deserved anything else. I preached unto you in all sincerity, but you did not want to hear me; therefore you may now hear the devil. If you will not hear Him who says: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," then you may hear the executioner who shall heap all curses upon you and run a dagger through your body. This is then serving you right. For why do you despise the Word of God, which you should hear and embrace as the greatest treasure. But you hasten to your field and are engaged here and there so that you cannot attend the preaching of the Word. Do you suppose that by so doing you do not displease God? He has given you six days for labor and the earning of your bread. He claims only the seventh day in which you should serve Him, for His honor and your own good. And yet He shall not even have this?

Hence we should take to heart this earnest preaching of the Lord against the Jews, who despised the marriage, that is, the preaching of the holy Gospel, and mocked and murdered the servants. From this we learn that the King will not suffer such ingratitude and contempt. He sends forth His armies, the Romans, to destroy those murderers and to burn their city. Who can here accuse God of having dealt unjustly?

Suppose a powerful prince has a son whom he sends to liberate some prisoners, and suppose these prisoners arise and do not receive him with joy, but kill him and mock the father besides; do you think the father would laugh at such conduct? He would rather demolish the prison with the prisoners, and would be right in doing it. So God does. He sends His Son to deliver us from sin, death, and the devil, and to give us eternal life. Therefore it is becoming that we receive Him with great joy and all honors, accept His Word, and believe in Him. But as it is, we turn our backs on Him, despise His Word and the counsel and help which He thereby offers, and go to our fields and merchandise, which we greatly prefer.

But if at some time we are overtaken by thunder and lightning, pestilence, the Turks, executioners, or any other calamity, and we dolefully complain, howl, and cry in our anguish, and still find no help, then we may take and suffer all as well deserved; because we have been ungrateful to God who has given us His blessed Word pure and richly in these latter evil times, in which faith and the knowledge of Christ is well nigh extinct, and besides have most shamefully rejected all. That will be a just reckoning. And we may now be satisfied, that God does not at once visit us with hell-fire, but by external punishment calls us to repent and to amend our ways.

This is meant when the Evangelist says: “The king sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.” It also serves for our warning, that we may not be offended at the common mass of people in city and country, nor follow their bad example. We cannot expect anything else of the children of this world. They do not want the Word of God, but prefer their farms and merchandise. But woe unto them; the judgment which will follow we learn from the Jews.

Therefore let us not follow their example, but love to hear the Word with all diligence. And especially let us for the Lord’s sake who sends them, love and esteem the servants who bid us come to the marriage. Then God will be with us in every distress, shield and help us, and at last give us eternal life, for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, our dear Bridegroom.

So much concerning the first part about the Jews, who have passed away. Now let us proceed in pointing to the experience of the heathen. They were outside the city, on the highways, and had no law nor Word of God like the Jews. They were not protected by a wall, but were exposed in open fields, in which the devil could move to and fro at pleasure. These the king also orders to be invited, man and wife, young and old, rich and poor, without any distinction. So we still see today that God has placed before us His holy Baptism, His Word and the holy Supper to be imparted to every one who wishes.

This “call” therefore is nothing else than that Christ is preached to us all, that we are brought to holy Baptism, in order that we may be guests, eat and drink, that is, have forgiveness of sins, eternal life and victory over hell and the devil. Thus are we heathens called to this supper.

When the room at the table was filled, there were evil and good invited, as is evident from the statement, “the king came in to see the guests, and he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment.” Among Christians we always discover a mixture; some are evil, but still have the name and are called Christians, because they are baptized, partake of the Lord’s Supper, and go to hear the preaching of the Word, and yet have nothing but the name and do not consider the Word to be true.

To this we must accustom ourselves. We will never convert a whole city, village, or house by preaching; but as is here written “gather together both bad and good;” this we must comply with and suffer all to be called Christians. And though they are not pious, yet they are invited guests. This will continue to be so until the last day, when there will be found a different judgment.

But at the same time it has surely been determined that this king shall not merely have all invited to the marriage of his son, but also that he will see whether those who have been called have dressed themselves in honor of the bridegroom. If a sooty person, coming from the sledge or the smithy, in a gown and bathing-cap, with beard and face besmirched, though he were bidden to the wedding, would join the guests and enter the procession, no one would want to walk by his side; every one, and especially the bridegroom, would take him to be out of his senses or that he intended to mock him. To a wedding one ought to come decently dressed. Thus, the Lord says, it will be here. Though you are an invited guest, that is, you are baptized, hear the preaching of the Word, partake of the Sacrament, yet if you have no wedding garment on, that is, you believe not and are not in earnest, but bear your Christian name like the pope and his followers, in order that you may feed your body and hold good positions, you are no Christian and do not care for your soul’s salvation. If you were, you would make better use of the Word.

Do not suppose that you will pass with the rest. The king will notice you and call upon you, either at the last day or at your death, and say: Do I find you here, calling yourself a Christian and yet not believing what a Christian should believe. Never in your life have you been anxious to be delivered from sin and to be eternally saved. All your thoughts have altogether been directed upon temporal goods, honor, sumptuous living, etc.; hence you

appear now like a sooty guest. Therefore away with you; you do not belong to those who have on a wedding garment; they might be defiled by you.

When such vile Christians are thus spoken to, either by their own conscience or at the day of judgment, they become, as the Lord says, “speechless;” that is, they are not able to offer any excuse. For wherewith would they be able to excuse themselves? God has done His part. He has given you holy Baptism, and has brought near you and to your home the precious Gospel: so also the absolution and the blessed supper. In the Church He has ordained for you His servants and in the family He has appointed father and mother, master and mistress, to tell you What to believe and how to live. Therefore you cannot say that you were ignorant, else you would have believed. You will have to confess: It is true, I have been baptized, I have been preached and spoken to often, but I did not listen, I preferred the world. This is meant by the guest having no wedding garment on and be coming speechless. For who would be able to answer the Judge, of, whom we must ourselves testify that He has given us His Son and has offered us all grace in Baptism and the holy Gospel? It is our fault only, that we do not stretch forth our hands and accept what He gladly offers.

Hence the terrible judgment upon unbelieving Christians must follow: Bind him hand and foot and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; that is, they must be captives forever with the devil in hell. For their hands and feet are bound and they shall not be able to loose themselves by their own works. Besides they are in outer darkness and are separated from the light of God and from all comfort, and are doomed to eternal anguish, horror and sorrow, and will never be permitted to see a spark of divine light.

It is a terrible calamity, which we ought to take to heart, to lie captive in hell and in torment, where there is nothing but weeping and gnashing of teeth: “gnashing of teeth” on account of severe cold, and “weeping” on account of great heat, as our old teachers have explained it. The Lord however by these terms indicates every conceivable torment. For heat and cold are two of the greatest plagues here upon earth. It is as though He would say: You shall have to suffer more than can be expressed by words or conceived by thoughts.

Such will be the punishment, for not having improved the time of visitation, for not having accepted the invitation, and for having had the Gospel, Absolution, Baptism and the holy Supper without having believed in them or used them for our good. The Lord is anxious to teach us and to enable us to realize the beautiful grace of being invited to such a blessed feast which offers deliverance from sin, death, the devil and eternal woe. Whoever therefore will not gratefully accept this offer, but rather despise God's grace, shall in its place have eternal death. Either one or the other: either the acceptance of the Gospel, faith and salvation, or unbelief and eternal damnation.

Our Gospel lesson perfectly agrees with the Words of St. Paul, when he tells the Jews, Acts 18: "Your blood be upon your heads. From henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles." When the Jews refused to hear, God destroyed them and sent His Gospel to us Gentiles. And as the Gospel has come to us we should take great care, lest that come to pass in us, which is here written, that God will single out and remove the guests having on no wedding garment. Would to God that by kind invitations and threatenings we would be induced to consider the Gospel our highest treasure and that we would gladly hear and believe it. By promises and grace He invites us and by great judgments He threatens us. When these two will not accomplish anything, then the devil will.

If God would turn rain into money and make us great lords, there would be no lack of people to come and perseveringly strive to obtain a portion from Him. But because He promises us eternal life and heavenly gifts in His Word, for which we have to hope and to wait patiently, they are very insignificant in the eyes of the world. They say, what do I care for heaven? Give me bread; who knows what heaven has in store?

The substance of our sermon today is this: The Lord would entice us and threaten us, that we might embrace the Word in all sincerity and believe it, and thus hope for the joyous future when He will return at the last day to deliver, us from all suffering and to help us bodily and spiritually.

May almighty God, our gracious Father grant it, through Jesus Christ, His Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Twenty-first Sunday After Trinity. John 4:46—54.

And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto Him, and besought Him that He would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto Him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house. This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when He was come out of Judea into Galilee.

In this Gospel lesson we have two points, which are full of comfort. The first is a miracle by which our dear Lord Jesus heals a sick boy with out even going near him, only telling his father: “Go thy way, thy son liveth.” And the boy is healed by this word, though he was miles away and knew nothing of that word.

This is an excellent and great miracle, from which we learn the almighty power of the Word. Whatever He promises He will surely keep, and neither the devil nor wicked men shall be able to prevent Him; for we must consider this disease as any other work by which the devil torments poor man. To destroy such works of the devil we need nothing but the Word of

our dear Lord Jesus, and it is done. As soon as this Word is spoken the devil is compelled to leave off.

This miracle is intended to serve, in the first place, that we may learn to know Christ, that He is not merely a man as other men are, but that He is also the eternal and almighty God; that He is Lord over death and the devil, and that He is a Lord who is able to overcome those wicked powers by a word. Hence we also should apply to Him for help in our troubles, against the devil and his works, as the nobleman did.

Especially should we appreciate His Word as an all-sufficient power. Whoever has His Word is able to do all things. But, whoever is without the Word can be saved from sin, death, and the devil, by no other power, wisdom, or holiness. For whatever our dear Lord Jesus here does in behalf of the son of the nobleman, when by a powerful word He saves him from death and restores him to life, He will also do for us all, if only we would accept it; He will not merely deliver us from bodily diseases and temporal troubles, but also from sin and eternal death.

We should therefore follow the example of the nobleman and apply to Christ for counsel and help in all our troubles. It is an easy matter for Him to help us in our distress; He needs but to speak the word and we are delivered. He is besides very willing to help us. The nobleman is in great haste and wants to avoid every delay, but the Lord is in still greater haste, and is not willing to leave the son of the nobleman in danger, until He and his father could reach him, but heals him at once even at a distance, and at the very moment when He said to the father: "Go thy way, thy son liveth." Thus the Lord Jesus is no doubt willing to help us, if in all confidence we ask Him. He was sent upon earth for the purpose of delivering us from sin, death and the tyranny of the devil, and to translate us into the eternal kingdom of God. For this purpose the Father, our merciful God in heaven, has sent Him, and for this purpose alone did He come.

Whoever therefore desires and seeks help against sin and death, shall surely find it, as we here learn from the nobleman, who merely sought bodily help. How much more willing will not the Lord be to help us out of a far greater danger and when we are in far greater need of His help when our eternal salvation is at stake?

This is the first point of which we commonly preach, when the miracles of Christ are treated upon. And they are wrought and described to us, that we may learn to know the power and good will of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, and draw nigh unto Him in every time of need.

The other point in our narrative and which is most generally enlarged upon, is the excellent example of faith, from which we can well learn what faith is. Our adversaries, the Papists, speak of faith as if it were mere knowledge, by which we may know what Christ is and what He has done. Yet they have to admit and confess that the devil and false Christians, who shall be condemned, know that as well as true Christians.

The Scriptures, however, speak of faith as the means by which we obtain forgiveness of sins, righteousness and eternal life. St. Paul says, Rom. 3: "We conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law." And as the prophet Habakkuk says: "The just shall live by his faith." And Christ to Mary, whose sins had been forgiven: "Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole." Such faith is not found with the devil nor false Christians, who know the history as well as true Christians. The devil knows Christ very well, and also what He has done and suffered upon earth. This a Christian must also know, and yet it is not the true faith by which we receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

But here we read what true faith is; namely, nothing else but believing what Christ says and promises, without wavering. This belongs together. Whenever God makes a promise, it is in our place to hold to it with all our heart and not doubt its truth, though as yet we do not have the fulfillment nor do we see it. If we have the promise, and depend upon it with all our heart and doubt not in the least, then we have true and living faith.

This we learn from the nobleman. He came to Christ and asked Him to go with him and to help his son. He had confidence in the Lord Jesus, that He was able and willing to help him. Such confidence was as yet without the Word, and rested upon the miracle which the Lord had performed in Galilee at the marriage. Of this the nobleman had undoubtedly heard, and he is induced thereby to trust in the Lord Jesus that He will also help him. This we may call faith; but it is yet a weak faith. The promise had not yet been given and the faith or confidence as we call it, still rested upon an uncertain opinion; it is a question yet, whether Christ Will help or not. In

case He will help, the nobleman will take Him to be a great saint; if not, he will not esteem Him so highly.

The Savior therefore meets him rather harshly, saying: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." As though He would say: Faith shall not rest upon signs and wonders, but upon the Word. Signs and wonders may be erroneous and deceptive; but whoever trusts in the Word, cannot be deceived; for God's promises are sure and cannot lie. Though the Lord has done signs and wonders in order to draw attention and to induce people to believe, yet it was His main object to teach the people to look more to His Word than to signs, which are only intended as testimonies to the Word. It was not His first object to deliver this or that person from bodily sickness; His main object and office was to point people to the Word and to engraft it upon their hearts that they might be saved thereby.

Because this nobleman had as yet no word or sure promise from Christ, he could have no certainty of faith. From the miracle at Cana and from other reports concerning Christ, as a new prophet, he takes courage to apply to Christ for the help of his son, feeling confident that He can help him. But this faith does not go beyond the help expected. Hence he is in a great hurry and fears the delay of the Savior, by which his son will be the loser. This is yet far from being the true faith. He argues thus: If Christ will not come in person to see the sick, he will not be helped; and again, if Christ will delay His coming and my son die in the mean time, all will again be in vain. And how could the nobleman as yet think different? He had no word or promise to rely upon. But when Christ opened His mouth and said: "Go thy way, thy son liveth," true and perfect faith follows, which, according to its nature, clings to the promise of Christ, as we learn from the nobleman. He believes the words of Christ, goes his way, puts full confidence in the promise, and doubts not in the least that on coming home he will find his son sound and well.

Then learn what it means, to "believe." It means nothing else than to trust in the Word and promises of Christ as sure and certain, though we do not see it or feel it. It is the peculiar nature of faith to deal in things not yet present. Things present we do not need to believe; we see and feel them.

A rich man, having plenty of money and goods, does not need to believe that for the present there is no necessity of starving. But it is different in the

case of a poor man who cleaves to the promise of God's Word, trusting that God, his heavenly Father, will provide, if on his part in the fear of God he is faithful in his calling; he truly believes. And it is impossible that such faith should be disappointed; it rests on the words of Almighty God, who promises that if we first seek the kingdom of God, all these things shall be added unto us.

We all experience that by sin, every one of us has been poisoned to such a degree that we are void of righteousness altogether. And as the Word promises forgiveness of sins and righteousness through Christ, this Word cannot be accepted otherwise than by faith. A Christian is in a peculiar situation. In himself he is altogether sinful, but according to the Word and faith he is without sin — he is pure and righteous. This is the glorious effect of faith, and can never be reached by works, as the servants of the pope preach. As to works, be they ever so good, we are at best but unprofitable servants in performing them, as the Lord tells us Luke 17.

As I have said concerning righteousness, so must I also say concerning life. We are thoroughly drowned by sin in death, so that we are not secure for a single moment, and have to admit the truth, as held by the Gentiles even, that, after man's birth, there is nothing more surely to come upon him than death. From the example of others and ourselves we learn and experience continually, how suddenly man may be overtaken by diseases and other calamities. Yet, in this vale of tears we have the Word that is full of consolation not only for this life, but also for the life to come. This we who believe do not hold in our hands; we do not see it and grasp it; but it is promised in the Word, and we believe it. And it is certain that, having this faith, we shall not be put to shame, because it rests upon the Word of God, which is eternal and almighty.

In short, as the Word promises future, eternal and heavenly gifts, so it is the nature of this faith to lay hold on these gifts as though they were already present, and to shut out all doubts. It takes it for granted that the Word of God is almighty, and that God is true and no liar. Faith has a keen eye for the Word of God. If it is sure that it has the Word of God, it feels safe against the devil and the world, and is certain of the Victory in spite of the devil.

Again, when faith has no Word of God it is not induced by appearances, or the threatenings or power of the world, to hold that to be true for which it has no ground. It would rather suffer any consequences, be they what they may. If in the papacy we had followed this faith, we would not have been misled so shamefully and brought into idolatry and error. But we had lost sight of God's Word, and, instead of believing, we had fallen upon works, as though we could thereby obtain remission of sins; and therefore, by false worship and idolatry we not only lost our goods, but also our souls.

Hence it is most necessary and beneficial to know what it means to have the true faith; namely, to have the Word and promises of God and to trust in that Word, being assured that it will be fulfilled to the very letter. To believe anything without the Word is no faith at all, but a mere illusion, just as if you believed that you are to become emperor of Rome. If you even firmly resolved upon this, it would never come to pass. But when David in his low estate received the Word of God by the prophet Samuel, that he should become king of Israel, he had to become king in spite of all that Saul could do against it.

This is also the case here. Though the noble man had his thoughts, that Christ would help his son, yet these thoughts would have accomplished nothing. The reason is that he had no word for it. But when the word came, which he heard from Christ: "Go thy way, thy son liveth," all doubt must vanish. He could not reject the words that were spoken, unless he would pronounce Christ a liar.

Thus we also have the Word and promise, as our dear Lord Jesus comforts the whole world when He saith, John 8: "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." And again John says of Him: "This is the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world." These are universal passages from which no one is excluded. The Lord does not say: if this one or that one believes in me, but: if a man, that is any man, keep my saying, he shall never see death. Neither does John say that God has sent His Son as the propitiation of the sins of this one or that one, but for the sins of the whole world.

Therefore, because you are a sinner and in the World, accept the offer and doubt not in the least that you are intended and included. This is the foundation upon which faith must rest as regards the forgiveness of sins and

eternal life. If our faith is based upon such a foundation we shall not be disappointed, as we learn from the experience of the nobleman.

We should not suppose that the nobleman had any advantage over us, so that he could more easily be induced to believe, because the Lord addressed him in person, saying: "Go thy way, thy son liveth," while for us it is more difficult to believe, because we are not so personally included in the Word, but must appropriate it to ourselves when spoken in general. This is not the intention. Nor has our dear Lord Jesus proclaimed this doctrine to us in a general way merely, but as He said to the nobleman: "Go thy way, thy son liveth," so He also says to every one of us in particular: My son, thy sins are forgiven thee; thou shalt have eternal life.

And say, to whom does God speak and with whom does He deal when you are baptized? Is it not true that such Baptism is intended for you and for no one else? You enjoy your Baptism, not others. If they want to enjoy Baptism, they must be baptized themselves. And what does God tell you and every one that is baptized? His assurance is: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." And, again, you are baptized into the death of Christ. He has suffered death for you to redeem you from sin and death. And how could God speak to you more cheerfully and in His Word refer to you more definitely and particularly than He does in your Baptism, which is really yours, and pertains to no one else?

And when you long for the forgiveness of sins and apply to the servant of the Church, or to any other Christian, with a view of obtaining the Word of God and the comfort you need, do you not really hear the doctrine that Christ has died for the sins of the world, which is preached publicly in general, applied to you in particular for your own personal appropriation? For the words then spoken are these: Dear brother, dear sister, we are all sinners, and on that account would have to be condemned; but God the Son has for our sake become man, and has died for our sins and was raised again for our justification. Therefore do not give up in despair; Christ has rendered satisfaction for you; you shall be free; only be comforted on account of His sufferings and trust in them.

Thus also in the Sacrament of the Altar the body and blood of the Savior is given unto you under the external signs of bread and wine, and you in particular are assured: His body is given for you and His blood is shed for

you, and you are meant to accept this sacrifice as your own, without any doubt; for which reason also the body and blood of Christ are given unto you and put in your mouth, so that you yourself may eat and drink it. Here God deals only with you, who approach the table of the Lord and there eat and drink, as He has commanded.

Here we may judge what manner of Christians those are who for a long while do not desire absolution or come to the blessed Supper of the Lord. Those who have no desire for these blessings and believe not that God wants to deal with them in particular by speaking to them words of comfort and assuring them of the forgiveness of sins and of life everlasting, deserve nothing else than that Satan should deal with them and speak to them. Hence there is no lack of God's speaking to us individually; the trouble rather is that we do not follow the example of the nobleman by accepting the promises of Christ to us as sure and infallible.

If the nobleman had followed the dictates of reason and not the Word, he would have had many excuses for not believing. For who would have believed the Word to be so powerful at such a distance and to effect such a miracle? He might have well said: I know how dangerous was the condition of my son when I left him; if he is to be helped at all, it will not suffice for you, dear Lord, to speak to me; you must come to see him, lay your hand on him, and speak to him, if any hope is to be entertained. But the nobleman overcomes all such thoughts, cleaves to the Word, and trusts in it, as sure as if he had already seen his son sound and well. If he had not been right at heart, he would not have been satisfied with a mere word. But he was well satisfied with the word, as St. John beautifully says: "The man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way."

Thus you see what faith really is, if you wish to have it described or defined. It is nothing else than the certainty and confidence which you place in the words of Christ. Remember, first of all, what God promises you in the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And then cleave to those promises, and do not listen to opposing thoughts, which will arise continually, nor suffer your faith to be shaken in any way. We continually feel sin and death. If you do not cleave to the Word, but lose sight of it and give way to annoying thoughts, sin will cause you great trouble and despair, and death will be inevitable.

And what does a Christian do in such circumstances? He knows that he is a sinner and that, on that account, death has come upon him. But he turns about, saying: Christ has died for me; hence I am free from sin and cannot die; Christ has made atonement for me and paid all that was claimed of me. This is genuine faith; and cleaving to the Word, it is impossible that it should be disappointed and deceived.

You may answer: I do not see the things which I am urged to believe, much less do I have them; I merely hear of them; who knows whether they are true? I answer, only believe what the Word tells you, and you shall not be disappointed; it will certainly come to pass. Follow the example of the nobleman; he too had to take the Word for it. He did not see that his son was well. But because he believes the Word, he is told by his servants the next day, Thy son liveth and is sound and well. And when he came home, he saw it with his own eyes. Then he need not any longer believe it, but sees what before he had believed.

The same will be the case with us. We do not feel forgiveness of sins and eternal life now. If today you go to Church, receive absolution and partake of the Holy Supper, you are as to your person the same as you were yesterday; you do not in any way feel different, and flesh and blood remain the same as before. Let not this offend you, but adhere to the Word, which promises you forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Go thy way, like the noble man, doubt not in the least, and your hour of deliverance will certainly come. As you believe forgiveness of sins and eternal life, for Christ's sake, you will in due time have it in the life to come. Here we have it in word and faith, but there in deed and by experience.

May God our heavenly Father grant this, for the sake of Jesus Christ His Son, through the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Twenty-second Sunday After Trinity Matt. 18:21—35.

Then came Peter to Him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshiped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him a hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

The substance of the Gospel for today is stated at the beginning. Peter asks the Lord how to proceed in case his brother has sinned against him, how often he should forgive him, and whether it is enough to forgive him seven times. The Lord answered and said unto him: "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." That is, among Christians, forgiveness of sins shall have no measure and no end; one shall forgive the other always and beware of taking revenge; for this belongs to God alone, and His majesty and power we should never interfere with. This the parable treats of at some length, the reasons for which we will hereafter collect and notice one after another.

Here, however, we must notice especially the words of the Lord when He says: "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants." For the command concerning forgiveness of sins we should never apply to kingdoms of this world, in which offices and persons are not alike, but where one has always power and command over the other. Here malice is not to be tolerated nor are people to be allowed to do what they please; but misconduct must be punished and people must be admonished to live honorably and righteously.

It is not designed here to teach that a father should forgive his children everything and overlook their rascality. He should punish, and forgive nothing. So master and mistress and the temporal magistrate should not forgive their servants and subjects their misdemeanor, but punish them. For it is the wicked habit of the world to grow worse and worse the more its transgressions are overlooked; and if children do not want to be trained by father and mother, they must be trained by the executioner, who has to put an end to their wantonness.

Therefore this command does not pertain to the kingdoms of this world, where persons and offices are not alike, as was said before, but to the kingdom of heaven, in which we are all alike and have but one Lord, who is to be enjoyed by all. This "kingdom of heaven" begins here on earth, and is otherwise called the Christian Church on earth, in which God reigns by His Word and Spirit. In this Church, unless a person holds a special office which is commanded to punish evildoers, we are required to forgive one another, not to take revenge, but to be merciful and kind to our neighbor wherever he is in need, though he might have deserved, according to the language of the world, that we should visit on him all manner of evil. Why

the Lord Jesus wants us to forgive, He shows us in the parable concerning the two servants and the king.

The first reason is, because our dear Lord wants all His Christians to remember the unbounded grace which He has been showing them, whilst He would have had great reason to punish them and to send upon them all manner of misfortune. And because we have been enjoying undeserved grace we should confer the same favor upon our neighbor. This therefore is carefully to be heeded. The Lord here shows us the proper way to obtain forgiveness of sins, and tells us very plainly what we are, what God is and does, and what we deserve of him.

By the parable about the servant who owed ten thousand talents, the Lord would teach us our condition before the judgment of God. The word “talentum,” which is rendered talents in English, is a certain sum of money among the ancients, amounting to about six hundred crowns or dollars. Ten thousand “talents” therefore make an immensely large sum — about six millions of crowns or dollars. To such a great amount the Lord compares our sins, in order to show us that we can never remove them nor render satisfaction for them. For sin has been inherited by us, and we bring it with us from our mother’s womb. And the more we grow up and increase in age, the more it makes itself felt, so that we add to the sin inherited from others our own sins also, and thus our debt toward God grows and overwhelms us, as was the case with this servant.

But what is the judgment on this servant because of his great debt? It is this, that “his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had.” Thereby the Lord wants to inform us that we poor sinners are not only unable to pay, but also must suffer death on account of our sins. St. Paul says: “The wages of sin is death.” God also threatens Adam and Eve in Paradise: “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” On account of our sins the law of God pronounces such a severe sentence on us all and delivers us unto death. For if there were no sin, no one would have to die. But what shall we do now? Our debt is obvious, and we cannot deny it. The Lord wants to be paid, but we have nothing to pay it with; it is impossible for us to pay.

To be relieved of the great debt and to escape death is the great, noble, and comfortable thing which we should open our ears and hearts to hear, that we might realize and learn it. But this is done only when we do as the Lord says that this servant did. He beholds both his great debt and his inability and punishment. The servant therefore fell down and worshiped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. This we call repenting and asking for grace.

This the Lord would have us learn, if we wish to be delivered from our debt. For whoever would not acknowledge but deny his debt, as the Pharisees do, though they all consider themselves pious and righteous, would only make matters worse. But if we acknowledge our sins, we are caught; for we can never pay the debt. It is a dangerous and terrible error to point people to their own works and satisfaction to atone for sin, as is done in popery. The only way is that you acknowledge your debt or sins and, like the servant, fall down and ask for pardon, praying with the publican, Luke 18: "God be merciful to me a sinner."

And yet, you may rejoin, the servant promises to pay all that he owes. He may say what he will, we must contend that it was impossible for him to do it. Hence it appears as if Christ wanted to intimate the condition of our hearts in such cases, namely, that we cannot comprehend such rich and unbounded grace. It always appears to us as though it were too much and as though God would not be so gracious as to forgive all, but would still require something to be paid. It appears to be too much that everything should be forgiven. Such thoughts of ours the Lord wanted to point out by speaking of the servant who asked for grace, yet at the same time promised to pay all he owed. And it is also true: Whoever desires forgiveness of his sins with all his heart, must at least have determined not to increase his debt; but to abstain from sin, to repent, and to live a better life in future. For to ask forgiveness and at the same time to continue in sin and not be willing to abandon it, would be mockery.

But how will he who thus resorts to the mercy of God and ask for grace find God disposed? He will find Him most willing and merciful. Hear what the Son of God, who is in, the bosom of the Father, tells us: "Then the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and for gave him the debt." This shows us the true color with which alone we can

properly represent God and His heart. Whoever paints Him in other colors does not present Him as He really is.

To think of God as a severe judge with whom sinners find no mercy, but of whom they can expect nothing but wrath, is altogether erroneous. This is not the case, though the law teaches nothing else of God. For the law speaks of sinners who do not desire and do not hope for any grace. But those sinners who acknowledge their sins, repent of them, and wish that they had not offended God — who mourn and lament that their lives have been in opposition to God and His commandments, and therefore ask for mercy — shall find mercy, as is here testified. The reason is that God is a merciful God and has a paternal heart. He has pity on us in our misfortune and is moved with compassion, as He declares by the prophet: “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?” Therefore when He finds you to be desirous of divine grace, and to hate sin and abandon it, He will cheerfully forgive your debt and show mercy unto you; as we here learn from the servant who acknowledges his debt and asks for mercy.

But as regards the means by which God will be gracious, the Gospel informs us of this in other places; namely, that the Son of God, our dear Lord Jesus Christ, took pity on poor sinners, took their sins upon Himself and paid their penalty by His death. Whoever now trusts in the Lord Jesus and in His death, has gained the good will of God, so that He can neither be angry nor punish. For aside from this He has a heart full of compassion and is moved by our misery. For this reason He of His own accord promised, as soon as Adam and Eve had fallen into sin and death, that the devil should be divested of his power by the seed of the woman.

This is now our doctrine, which we, thank God, have in its purity in our churches; namely, that we have forgiveness of sins and eternal righteousness and eternal life solely by faith in Jesus Christ, that is, by God’s grace and mercy. This we here learn from the servant who owes so great an amount, but who is released from his debt, without merit or works, solely by grace, simply because he trusts in grace and asks for it.

Therefore it is an erroneous, false, blasphemous doctrine which is taught by the Papists, that, when they preach about forgiveness of sins, they point to people involved in a debt which they are never able to pay, to their own

works. But when we direct the people alone to the grace of God in Christ Jesus, they call us errorists and heretics. But, take this Gospel and judge who accords with it, we, who preach about grace, or they, who preach about their works and satisfaction. In short, the object of this whole sermon is to teach us that God will pardon us and will accept of us freely and solely by grace, forgiving all our debt. Of such grace the Lord reminds us here, that we may follow His example and be kind and gracious one toward another and not be so strict in our accounts with our neighbors. For thus only we conduct ourselves like Christians, who have experienced grace themselves and are now gracious toward all. This is the first reason which the Lord here urges, teaching at the same time that the true way of salvation is to obtain grace and forgiveness of sins.

The other reason is that the Lord wants us to consider well the harm and unfair dealing of our neighbor toward us, so that, if we weigh well our own debt toward God and the debt of our neighbor toward us, our debt will amount to ten thousand talents whilst the debt of our neighbor toward us will be but a hundred pence. The fact that God has forgiven us so great a debt will induce us not to be so strict in our small account with our neighbor, but to be reasonable and generous.

A denarius, which is rendered pence in the English version, is an old Roman coin, valued at about a dime. A hundred such pence, compared with ten thousand talents, of which each one amounts to about six hundred dollars, is a very small sum. The Lord in fact says: Though you would estimate your loss very highly, on which account you think that you have reason to be angry, what does it amount to? It is not one gilder compared with a hundred thousand which you owe the Lord your God. If then God closed His eyes against your debt and does not take account of it, how can you be so unmerciful and so hard as to forgive nothing and to reckon so very closely? Do not do it, for God's sake! Put your sins upon a balance and also the sins of your neighbor, and do the same as your heavenly Father has done in regard to your many sins, and you will be true Christians.

The third reason is that in the parable He calls us servants. "The same servant," He says, "went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him a hundred pence." This also should induce us to abstain from wrath and to be merciful. For we are only "fellow-servants," and have all one and the same Lord over us, who can punish every one as he deserves.

We should leave Him undisturbed in His power and right, and not interfere. He will not suffer you to meddle in His office and to do what belongs to Him alone. So the Lord says in another place: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." It is an established order of God that He will punish the sinner, and He has for this work not merely the wicked enemy to attack life and property and to do harm in various ways, where God permits him, but He also has here upon earth father and mother, master and mistress and civil government. These all have received the command from God to punish the evil-doer.

Therefore, whether you are a child or a servant; take heed unto yourself when you are wronged by other children or servants; be not overcome by wrath and thus induced to take revenge and refuse forgiveness. Think: It is my fellow-servant; I have no power over him; I will let him punish who is lord over us both. If he will not do as his office requires, there is One over us all who will not leave the evil-doer unpunished. In short, all are asked thus to conduct themselves one toward another and to abstain from wrath. This is the meaning of the words used by the Lord in the parable: "The same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants."

The fourth reason is this: If one will not observe the teachings of the Lord, and will remember neither the inestimable grace of God toward him nor the small debt of his neighbor who is his fellow-servant and over whom he has no power, but will have his own way, relinquish nothing, take revenge and punish, what would he accomplish by it? Nothing else than that such great unreasonableness and unmercifulness would be come known. Other Christians will see it, feel very sorry for it, and report all to the Lord. Or, in other words: By such unmercifulness the Holy Ghost is grieved in Christians; they are pained, and sigh to God on account of it. And no one has reason to think that such sighing is in vain. For if the Lord would otherwise seem not to know or see and to be slow in punishment, He would be compelled by the sighing and complaining of those other Christians to inquire into matters and to hasten punishment.

For in like manner as the intercession of pious people is not in vain, so the common curse and complaints against the wicked is not in vain either. Hence the Lord hereby warns us not to despise such common curse, but to be kind and merciful toward our fellow-servant; for then we will find

Christians who will thank God for such mercy, and wish that God may reward us and do the same unto us.

Those are indeed unhappy and wicked people who despise both the common blessing and the common curse, both of which are effective, the blessing for the pious and the curse for the wicked. This is experienced especially when hard times set in. "He that withholdeth corn," as is common with the avaricious, until it will bring more money, "the people shall curse him; but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it," as Solomon says, Prov. 11. Both are despised by the wicked. But see whether such curse is in vain, and whether those who make themselves guilty of it, are not overtaken by all kinds of misfortune. The Lord here urges us to be careful and not to occasion our fellow-servants to feel grieved and to come before the Lord and tell what they have seen. For hearken to what follows.

The Lord called that wicked servant to appear before Him. This is the fifth reason. When you will show no mercy to your neighbor, but take revenge and punish him, God will not keep silent, but will call you to an account. This will be done at the last day. Then the terrible judgment will be executed which is written: "His Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him."

What then, poor man, have you gained by your wrath? You might have had a merciful God and all your debt might have been forgiven, if only you had been merciful toward your neighbor and forgiven his offense. Now God will not forgive you either, but be as strict in His account against you as you were in your account against your neighbor.

That is a poor bargain in which you lose ten thousand talents on account of a hundred pence. Yet this parable is very inadequate to represent the misery of being deprived of the forgiveness of sins, so that the soul must remain under the wrath and indignation of God forever.

Therefore the Lord concludes: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." He calls us brethren one of another; among brethren enmity and unkindness is altogether unbecoming. But we are all so frail that it will be impossible for us so to live as not at times to offend one another in words and actions.

Should we then bite and scratch each other like dogs and cats? No, but we should heartily forgive and ask: Of what should I accuse my brother? If God is merciful unto me and for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ forgives me so great a debt, why should I make so much ado about a penny or two? I will call it square, forgive and forget, and thank God that He has forgiven me and made me partaker of His grace, whilst He had a thousand times more reason to be angry and to punish me than I had to be angry and to punish my neighbor.

This is the doctrine which our dear Lord to day orders to be preached to His beloved Christians, in order that we may learn to control ourselves and not to give way to wrath, but that we may settle our debt with our neighbor and be glad that we succeed in removing both his debt and our own.

But, alas! we are so slow to yield, and suffer ourselves to be led and driven by the devil to wrath, vengeance and all evils, to our own great injury and loss. For it has been decided: If you are not willing to forgive, neither will God forgive you. If you take revenge, live at enmity and punish, God will also take revenge, be your enemy and punish you. And a severe wrath and punishment it will be. For God's wrath and punishment will last forever. To this wrath and punishment you expose yourselves on account of a small debt, to which you have no claim, but which belongs to God, who will surely punish the sins of your fellow-servant more severely and more terribly than you can conceive, if you only do not interfere.

Thus we also observe that one sin is punished by another sin. Those given to vengeance and wrath and contention, are led by the devil into such passion that they are unable to pray the Lord's Prayer. For they discover a thorn in it which will not pass over their lips, inasmuch as a Christian is commanded to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." They very well feel that if God will not forgive them unless they themselves forgive others, their own sins will never be forgiven.

Such a judgment they do not want to pronounce on themselves and would therefore rather not say the Lord's Prayer. Do you not think the devil has them under his control, since they even prefer vengeance to prayer? With the loss of prayer they lose everything; yea, they make themselves guilty of a twofold disobedience to God.

Thus it comes too that such people abstain from the holy Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ and rob themselves, on account of a small, insignificant and unreasonable wrath against their neighbor, of the highest comfort against sin and an evil conscience. Would it not be a thousand times better to give up all wrath, to suffer wrong, and to be reconciled, than to rob ourselves willfully and wantonly of the grace of God and to fall under His wrath?

Therefore let him whose heart is thus hardened in wrath and hatred take this Gospel, consider it well, and ask God to forgive him the sin of having continued so long in hatred against his neighbor and of having lived a life of wickedness, and let him at once forgive with all his heart, in order that the sentence and judgment of God may not overtake him, but that he also may obtain forgiveness of sins and eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Savior.

May God, our gracious Father in heaven, grant this to us all. Amen.

Twenty-third Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 22:15—22.

Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent out unto Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that Thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest Thou for any man: for Thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest Thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto Him a penny. And He saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Cesar's. Then saith He unto them, Render therefore unto Cesar the things which are Cesar's, and unto God the things that are God's. When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him, and went their way.

The facts recorded in the Gospel for today were occasioned by a certain promise in the writings of Moses, according to which the people of Israel, if they would adhere to the laws of God, should have a kingdom of their own and a king out of their own people, and not be subject to a foreign king. To this promise the Israelites held, and they were confident that it would be fulfilled. But when the Romans came and overpowered them, though at a great sacrifice, the Jews were very much offended and caused a great deal of anguish and tribulation in the country, hoping to liberate themselves again from foreign bondage. But they were completely vanquished and so humbled that they could never again venture to rise against the Romans.

Here we may behold the vice of us all. One thing the Jews had remembered well; namely, that they should have a kingdom of their own; but what was connected with it, to wit, that they were to keep the

commands of God and to undertake nothing against His will, they did not remember. The kingdom, they would say, belongs to us and we will have it. Just as if a maid-servant would tell her mistress: The wages you have promised and the wages I will have, but will otherwise do as I please. But this will never do, and such a servant will soon be told: 'If you expect wages, you must work and do what I tell you. The same was the case with the Jews; they were disobedient and stubborn and did not regard God's commands, and yet they expected to be free.

Hence it was a great question among them: Shall we submit to the emperor of Rome, a heathen, notwithstanding that we have a definite promise to have a king of our own? They therefore take counsel together how they may entangle the Lord in His talk. They send out to Him their disciples with the Herodians to ask Him: Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cesar, or not? They imagine that they have cornered Him, whether He would say yea or nay. They argue thus: If the Lord should say yea, the whole people will arise against Him and will call Him a blasphemer and a liar, whose doctrines are in opposition to the doctrine of God and of Moses. For there the promise was given, that they should be a free and separate nation and that they should not serve a foreign or heathen master. If, on the other hand, He should say nay, He has again pronounced His own sentence; of this they are sure, because the Romans would not endure it. In this strait they endeavor to put Him, so that, whether He say yea or nay, He is ensnared and ruined. This is the wickedness and poison of the enemies of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But how do they succeed in their wicked plans? The Lord turns the weapon with which they had intended to destroy Him, and conquers them with their own weapon. Show me the tribute money, He says. And when they had brought unto Him a penny, He asks then: "Whose is this image and superscription?" This seems to be a very simple proceeding. The Pharisees as yet do not think of being detected in their wickedness and therefore they answer very readily: The image and superscription are Cesar's. This is all the Lord wants to hear. He now asks them: Did you say that this image and superscription are Cesar's? They answer, yea, we say it. The Lord now continues: If then you have Cesar's goods and money, then render unto Cesar the things which are Cesar's. By confessing that they make use of Cesar's money they confessed also that they accepted him as their emperor.

Hence it is an easy matter for the Lord to draw the conclusion from their own words, that the things which belong to Cesar should not be taken from him.

This is the occasion of our Gospel lesson. The Pharisees endeavored to betray and to sell the Lord Jesus, whilst they themselves had to swallow the bitter cup which they had intended for Him. They intended to entangle Him in His talk, but entangled themselves. He does not need to say either yea or nay, as an answer to their question; they themselves intimate to Him, by their own talk, what to answer and hand over to Him the sword wherewith to slay them.

This narrative teaches us two things. First, to learn, from the deplorable example of the Jews, our own depravity. We all, without any exception, feel inclined to complain, when in any way we feel hurt; we imagine that we are wronged. And, indeed, as regards our relations to men, we are sometimes wronged. We have not deserved of them that they should deal so unfaithfully with us. Therefore we see nothing but our rights, and the wrongs committed by our opponents; we cry and complain as the Jews did against the Romans, who reigned over the people of God, in opposition to God and right. They had no right, as we have said, to wage war against them and to subdue them; because they were heathens who did not have the Word of God and the true worship, as the Jews had. This was very painful to the Jews; they presumed that they had well understood their rights. But they missed it, as in such cases we also miss it. For although your neighbor has wronged you, you should not put so high an estimate upon it, but ask: How would it be, if I had grievously sinned against God and therefore deserved to be deprived, not merely of my rights, but also of my life and existence? This is the first point which we should take to heart.

It is true, the Jews found it exceedingly hard to be subject to a heathen emperor; they thought: We are the people of God, whilst the heathen know nothing of God, but live in idolatry and shame; how can it be that we should be their servants and they be our masters? The God-fearing and pious, however, lifted their hands to God and asked for mercy; they did not contend for rights all, but knew that they were not deserving of any.

The reason was this: The doctrine publicly preached was wrong, as we see in our Gospel lesson; neither was the discipline worth anything.

Avarice, usury, licentiousness, pride, luxury, and other sins, were sweeping along like a mighty wave. What could our Lord God do under these circumstances? Should He protect them, whilst they did not in the least care for His Word. Should He secure to them their rights, whilst they would not even bend a finger for Him and His service? This He could not do. Because they would not recognize His rights, He had good reason for not recognizing their rights either. Neither had God promised them a temporal kingdom to be continued for ever, but He had attached a condition to His promise; He had promised them a kingdom, if they would be pious and obedient and keep His commandments. These conditions they lost sight of, and did not care for His Word; and yet they wanted God to protect their government, no matter whether they were pious or wicked, like a servant who demands his wages, whether he has earned them or not. But the rule is: Do what you have been commanded, and you shall receive what is right. If a servant is neither pious nor obedient, nor willing to pay his tribute, he is not wronged if his master takes from him both his estate and his rights, and gives it to another who is more faithful and does what is due to his lord.

Hence we should be moderate in our complaints and be reasonable, and not merely look to our own rights over against others; but we should also remember our own wrongs over against God, and in all humility and patience lift up our hands unto God, saying: It is true, I have been wronged and have not deserved such treatment by this man; but I must look around and consider my own conduct towards God. If I do this, I will find and be convinced that I have sinned against God, ten, twenty, yea even a thousand times more than my neighbor has sinned against me. Therefore it becomes me to forget my complaints and to say: Forgive, O Lord; I will forgive also.

It would be wrong to defend our rights to the very last whilst we have been doing so much wrong against God. It is true, if one is able to defend his rights in a proper way and by fair means, he cannot be blamed. Law and justice have been instituted by God for the purpose of being used. But where our right cannot be maintained, let every one abstain from litigation and from being impatient, but let him turn and say: I should have had my rights, and those offending me should have been condemned; but I must confess that before God I have deserved such wrong. Then we would not do like the Jews, who in their life and conduct set a bad example, and still insisted on their rights, though God did not have His rights at their hands. It

is just as in the case of the wicked peasants, who expect protection from the government, but will not pay tribute nor give anything. Such wantonness God has condemned by giving the sword into the hands of the powers that be. If these people will not pay their dues of their own account, they can be taken hold of and compelled.

This however cannot be said with reference to poor preachers; they have no such power to compel those who do not pay them what they owe. Therefore wicked citizens and peasants imagine that they do right, when they do not give them anything, or at least not of the best, but of the very poorest quality. And what is the consequence? If a pastor cannot punish nor secure his rights, God will take the matter in hand and send pestilence among men and beasts. He will send thieves and officers to take what is left. He permits grapes, grain, fruits and vegetables to be destroyed by thunderstorms. Then it may be said: Dear citizen, dear peasant, do not complain of suffering wrong. You may imagine that you suffer wrong, but before God you receive but your dues. Before Him you have deserved all, yea even worse things. Hence do not complain of suffering wrong, but complain on account of your sins and impenitence, and on account of your covetousness, pride, carnal security, contempt of God's Word, etc., such sins turn your rights into real wrongs.

Of these facts the Lord reminds the Jews. Because they had lost their kingdom and had been subdued by the Romans, they should not now complain, but should remember their own faults; they should now be satisfied, because they had not given unto God the things that are God's. But the Jews did not want to do this; their minds were intent only on regaining their kingdom and their rights. Therefore the Lord says no! The emperor of Rome shall serve my purpose; if you will not willingly bear the well merited visitations which I have caused to come upon you, he shall compel you. The kingdom was not promised to the Jews under any other condition than that they should be pious; otherwise they should lose all, both their rights and the kingdom.

Similar must be our conduct in our day in regard to the Turks. Because they are worse than heathens it appears to be wrong that they should gain the victory over Christians. But let us not merely ask what the Turks are, but what we are before God; then we shall be convinced that we are not suffering any wrong. Why do the Papists hold tenaciously to idolatry and

persecute the Word? And why do not we, having the pure Gospel, mend our ways and live as it becomes Christians? This is the one point which is presented for our consideration today.

The other point refers to the difference between civil government and the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord does not condemn civil government, but confirms it with house, estate, food, the family, and other states, without which an empire could not exist. When the Savior says: "Give unto Cesar the things which are Cesar's," He tells us in other words: If you are a citizen, a peasant, a nobleman, a prince, a husband, a wife, a man-servant or a maid-servant, be contented, and do not disturb the existing empire. Servant, serve your master. Child, be subject to father and mother. These relations I do not want to sever nor destroy; they are Cesar's, and he cannot do without them; neither are they in opposition to my kingdom, which is not of this world.

We should here learn that whoever wants to be a Christian must not refuse obedience to civil government in order to be free, nor change his calling and begin something new, as the monks have been doing, who thought they could not be saved if they continued in their temporal calling. No, says Christ, this ought not to be; I do not want to destroy civil governments by my preaching. Continue in your calling and give unto Cesar what you owe him; in this God does not wish to disturb you; it does not interfere with your obedience to Him.

Besides this, you are required also to give unto God the things which are God's," that is, believe in the Lord Jesus, hear and accept the Gospel, and continue in the fear of God, according to His commandments. Be merciful, kind and patient. Let this be your offering unto God; it will be acceptable unto Him. But as regards the body, estate, calling and occupation, let Cesar also be heard. In this way full harmony may exist between God and Cesar, which the Jews endeavored to destroy by giving neither to God nor to Cesar the things which belong to them.

But here we should notice that as God does not wish to destroy the government of Cesar, because you are not disturbed thereby in your faith and in your relation toward God, whatever your calling may be — as you may be a Christian in anyone, so Cesar should not disturb in any way the government of God nor prevent the people from giving unto Him the things

which are His. What these are was stated above; namely, cheerfully to hear His Word, conform our lives thereto, and not to oppose it in any way. More than this we can not give unto God here on earth.

In the performance of this duty Cesar, or the civil government, should not disturb the subjects. In case this should be done, the subjects should refuse to be obedient and rather suffer the consequences which may follow. Therefore it is one of the most heinous sins, when the civil government requires obedience which conflicts with obedience toward God; as, for instance, when a government forbids the pure doctrine, or punishes its subjects because they insist on taking the full Sacrament as it was instituted by Christ, or compel the people to take part in idolatrous exercises, in masses for the departed, in indulgences, invocation of the saints, etc. In these things civil powers act beyond their office and interfere with obedience toward God. God demands of us, first of all, to hear and observe His Word. If civil governments should demand the contrary, their subjects should know that they do not owe obedience. For it is written: "We ought to obey God rather than men." And the Lord not only commands us to give "unto Cesar the things which are Cesar's," but also "to God the things which are God's."

If civil governments want to be offended on account of such obedience toward God and His Word, and to put their subjects into prison, or even take their lives, Christians must bear it, and comfort themselves with the Scriptures. Cesar, or the civil government, it is true, is our lord; but he is not our only lord: we have one besides him, who is greater and more powerful, the Lord God in heaven. If one of these two must be offended, by being disobedient either to God or to Cesar, it is better by disobedience to offend Cesar than God.

The reason is that if by disobedience to God you will endeavor to please Cesar, God is a Lord who is willing and able to punish your disobedience with hell-fire and eternal death. This misery no one should be willing to endure, and all should a thousand times rather offend Cesar, who, however angry he may be, can punish disobedience with temporal punishment only. By the name Cesar I do not mean this or that person, but all governments in general. This is also the meaning of Christ when He says: "Give unto Cesar the things which are Cesar's."

Then take into consideration the reward also. If you are obedient to God and keep His sayings, you shalt receive heaven and eternal life as a reward for your obedience. But if, on the other hand, contrary to God's command you render unreasonable and sinful obedience to your superiors, who gratify you for a short time only, you shall suffer for it in all eternity. By this poor Christians should be guided, who in our day live under governments which deprive them of God's Word and compel them to take part in the idolatry of the pope and a false worship. God will not be trifled with. He wants you to give unto Cesar the things which are Cesar's, but to God also the things which are God's. And this is quite reasonable. Cesar, or civil government, does not give us any more than food, eating and drinking, clothing, protection, peace, and whatever else belongs to this transient life. But from God we have life and existence, and also the hope of everlasting life. And because we are permitted to enjoy Him always, Why should we give Him up on account of man, and serve man instead of serving Him? God forbid that this should take place, let the consequences be as He pleases.

Civil governments also should understand better the claims to which their office entitles them. If Christ had said: Give unto Cesar all he asks or is in your possession, they would have been entitled to ask and take all. But He plainly says: "Give unto Cesar the things which are Cesar's;" that is, he is entitled to a certain amount only, and that ought to satisfy him. If he undertakes to ask more, even that which belongs to God, you are right in contending that you do not owe it. Neither dare you give it, if you do not want forfeit the salvation of your souls. Cesar has power to ask it, and God Himself has forbidden to give it.

The fact that civil authorities and especially the bishops, who, according to their present position, are nothing more than civil officers, treat the poor people in a shameful manner, is a great calamity, which will no doubt bring a great misfortune upon Germany. They are not satisfied with the obedience which subjects render in regard to property and life; but they ask more; they want them to believe and to do, in matters of faith, what they tell them and what is in open conflict with God and His Word. Hence they forbid the true doctrine and the hearing of it in places where it is preached. Yea, they even forbid the reading of good books. They appoint false preachers to preach old fables, from whom not a word is heard by which a troubled conscience

might be comforted and pacified; and, what is still worse, these babblers do not preach, but only mock and deride the holy Gospel most shamefully.

If they succeed in retaining the abominable and idolatrous sacrifice of the mass and in inducing people to invoke and worship the saints, to make pilgrimages, to buy indulgence and to expect forgiveness of sins by contrition, fasting, keeping of holy-days and other works, they imagine that they accomplish something great. Especially do they commit great wantonness in the use of the holy Sacrament, in reference to which the command of Christ and the usages of the primitive Church are so plain, requiring that the whole be taken and not merely a part of it.

In these and other things princes and bishops exercise their subjects to render obedience to the government; just as if it were written: Give all things to Cesar and nothing to God. For to follow Cesar in the things of God and not the Word of God, is nothing less than to place Cesar above God and to give unto Cesar all and to God nothing. But this is altogether wrong. God wants all subjects to be obedient to their government, and impresses this upon their minds by pointing them to the penalty which is inflicted on rebellion and disobedience to the government, as the rebellious peasants have experienced.

But God wants His obedience also. He wants to subject the body, house, goods and estate to Cesar, but Himself desires the heart, that He may govern it by His Word and Spirit. When He does not get this portion of His, but the civil ruler, be sides his power over the body and estate, seeks to extend this authority also over the heart and to govern it, desiring every one to believe and to deal in things which are God's according to his demands and not according to the demands and teachings of God in His Word, evil consequences must follow. God wants His kingdom unmolested and His service undisturbed. Whoever ventures to oppose it will dash against a wall and come to an unhappy end. This has been the experience of the greatest kings and potentates always and everywhere. As soon as they sought to have all, leaving nothing for God, God secured His own, and caused such tyrants to lose all and come to naught at last.

We see how the Lord defines and limits the power of Cesar very clearly, confining him to his own affairs and forbidding him to meddle with the kingdom and authority of God. "Give unto Cesar the things which are

Cesar's," He says; which is as much as to say: Do not, by any means, give unto Cesar the things which are God's, else you will be disobedient to me and over-obedient to Cesar; he may reward you for a while, but I will punish disobedience with hell-fire for ever. Let Cesar therefore content himself with his own. Or if he is not, take care not to give him what belongs to me; because these two kingdoms are to exist separate and not to be mixed, so that God may have the things which are God's, and Cesar the things which are Cesar's.

But also in temporal things, as regards the body, money, and estate, should moderation be exercised. There is a difference between a civil government and a tyrannical administration. A tyrant takes from his subjects as long as he finds anything to take. This the Lord of all governments forbids when He tells the subjects: "Give unto Cesar the things which are Cesar's." By these words He would have governments or Cesar to understand that they are not to ask for more than belongs to them. He thus makes a distinction between the things which belong to you, and that which you are to give of these things to the government. Governments are not instituted for the purpose of depriving all men of their own and of making them beggars. We pay tribute-money, taxes, or rent, in order that we, as subjects, may enjoy our own, seek support for ourselves and family in all modesty, and, if possible, to increase our estate.

If, however, for the maintenance of peace against the enemies, necessity requires that we make sacrifices, nobody should resist, but all should be ready to support the government by offering body and estate, as long as possible. But at other times, when there is no necessity for it, governments should not be tyrannical by laying heavy burdens upon their subjects, but be contented with ordinary contributions. Otherwise they are taking things which are not theirs, and will cause the wrath of God to come upon them, who punishes tyrants through rebellion, foreign enemies, and other means.

Let this comment on our text suffice. May God grant His grace to our government and us, that we both may give unto God all we owe Him. Then it will readily follow: Cesar also will receive and take what is his own. Thus we will spend our life in peace and the favor of God on earth, and be saved through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ for ever.

May God grant it, through Christ our Lord and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Twenty-fourth Sunday After Trinity Matt. 9:18-26.

While He spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshiped Him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did His disciples. And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind Him, and touched the hem of his garment: For she said within herself, If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole. But Jesus turned Him about, and when He saw her, He said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour. And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed Him to scorn. But when the people were put forth, He went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose. And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.

In today's Gospel you hear of two miracles, both of which are great and excellent. The first is of the woman whose faith in the Lord Jesus is so firm that she hoped to be healed at once, if she could but touch the hem of His garment secretly and without His knowledge. The other is of a certain ruler who also believes that the Lord is able to restore his daughter to life, though she was already dead. In both miracles faith is highly praised, that it may serve as an example for us, because faith in Christ accomplishes such great things, in order that thereby we may be encouraged gladly to approach Him, in whom no one has ever trusted in vain.

In the first place we have here the example of the poor woman who was afflicted with a dangerous and severe disease. St. Mark mentions especially

that she “had suffered many things of many physicians and had spent all she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.” The miracle is that, after so long a time of effort, she is speedily healed by the Lord, though she does nothing more than what she had heard of some others who had but touched His garment. She is convinced that she also will be healed; presses through the crowd to the Lord; does not even ask Him, but thinks in great humility of obtaining her object secretly; she therefore touches His garment. All at once her condition was changed for the better, as she had believed; the issue of blood ceased, from which she had suffered much and for the healing of which she had tried many things and spent all she had, but all in vain and to her own great injury. As St. Mark says “she was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.”

Here we must notice particularly that the Lord does not want us so to steal help from Him that no one shall know anything of it; therefore He asks: “Who touched my clothes?” To the apostles this question seems to be a foolish one, because the people were crowding very closely around Him. But the Lord knew what the apostles did not know. It was not a mere touching with her hands, the woman had touched Him with her heart and firm reliance on His grace and omnipotence. Therefore a special virtue had gone out from Him which He felt. Such touching the Lord, for our example, does not want to remain secret. With His questions He presses upon the woman, and she has to come out and be seen and to acknowledge before every one publicly all that has occurred in her case, in order that He may have occasion to praise such faith of hers. This is the most agreeable and the highest service, in which He is well pleased. Therefore He also praises the woman and addresses her cordially, saying: “Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole.” Now the disciples themselves must confess that the question of the Lord was not vain; it was not a common, but a peculiar touching, which concerns the Lord and us all.

Yet it seems singular language which the Lord here uses. He confesses that virtue is gone out of Him. As new the woman stands before Him and acknowledges the benefit bestowed by Him, He gives no indication that a virtue has gone out from Him, but ascribes all to the faith of the woman, although not she herself, but the Lord has helped her. But the Lord observes this manner in order to inform us thereby how well He is pleased if you expect from Him everything good and ask Him for help. It is as though He

would say: See to it, and learn to believe confidently, no matter in what need you are, that I will indeed more readily help you than you are prepared to ask. I am much more ready to deliver you from death than you are to desire life. This He proves by the fact; it is easy to obtain from Him the healing power so much desired. This example should teach us to believe and to expect everything good from Christ, in every time of need and anxiety. But, the fact is, we hear it preached, we are told of it at home, and perceive the miracles which He continues to perform every day, and yet we are very slow to believe. Whoever sees his cellar and granary filled may believe, and yet doubts whether he will have enough to eat and to drink for a year. Those who enjoy good health believe that God can help them. But when we are exposed to poverty and disease, then our faith is at an end. Then we do nothing but complain and cry, and imagine help to be found nowhere, though we are informed every day that God will be gracious unto us and help us through Christ.

How does such conduct of ours correspond to that of the woman? who perhaps has heard of Christ and His miracles but once or twice, and yet approaches Him with a faith so strong, that, if He had been away above all the heaven, she would have torn them asunder and brought Him down and compelled Him to help her. For, as we have said, He can not refuse to help if He is asked earnestly and in true faith.

Therefore we are indeed unhappy people, because we are so well provided with the Word of God and yet are so very slow to believe. This is the fault of the devil and of our shameful old Adam. For if we had an earnest desire for righteousness and salvation and all that we need, we would believe in the Lord Jesus and hope for everything through Him. For faith, as you have heard, can never be put to shame. Therefore the Lord extols faith very highly, saying: "Thy faith hath made thee whole." The same faith in Christ will also help us, raise us from death unto life, conquer the devil, dispel our sins, and give us eternal life; all of which, though it is done by Christ, is nevertheless ascribed to faith. For it can never be obtained without faith. Even Christ, the holy sacraments, and the Word of God, or the preaching of the Gospel, can not help or benefit us without faith. Faith must do it, else it will never be done. So much concerning the first miracle.

The other miracle is that wrought on the little girl, who, as St. Luke tells us, had lived as long as the woman had been afflicted with disease. Nobody expected anything else but that the maiden would surely have to die; therefore all preparations usually made in such cases had been completed. The minstrels were at hand to perform their part of the funeral service. The Jews had no church-bells as we have. Instead of tolling the bells at funerals as we do, they had their minstrels to sing funeral hymns. A great many people had met for the burial, and there was a great throng of those coming and going, as is usual at the death of a prominent person.

When all had despaired of the maiden, and no ground for human hope was left, seeing that the child was dead, the father is taken by the singular thought, that if he only had Christ, his deceased daughter might be made alive again. For this his words indicate: "He worshiped Him, saying: My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live." And although St. Mark and Luke tell us that the ruler had come to Jesus when his daughter was at the point of death, yet they inform us that she was dead by the time Christ entered the house. They also are careful to inform us that the father continued to believe notwithstanding, and to trust in the Lord that He would help and restore her to life. Who in all his life has seen or heard of more singular people than these? The woman who had to despair of all human help is determined to be well, if she only could get near the Lord and touch the least hem of His garment. And she is not disappointed in her expectation; as she had believed so is her experience. And the father whose daughter was dead, begins to think if the Lord would only lay His hand upon his deceased daughter, she would live again.

Yes, you may rejoice, the laying on of hands might accomplish something, if we had to deal with a common sleep and not with bitter death itself. In this case no hand, no shaking, no push, no calling, or anything else, will be of any use; it will all be in vain. So reason will and must argue, it can not do otherwise. But the ruler thought differently, else he would have stayed at home and not run after Christ.

Here we see once again how well the Lord is pleased with such faith, which is altogether foolishness to reason. For although He had important work to do and was led into a spirited discussion with the disciples of John, when He perceived this faith and confidence He arises at once to follow the ruler and to do as this man believed. Therefore, when He entered the house

and saw all the preparations for the burial, He is afraid that the father, beholding the lamentation and the example and unbelief of others, might be discouraged, and hence at once speaks words of comfort to him, and orders the people who had need for the burial to leave the house. It is as though He would say: What are you doing here? Do you expect to have a funeral? Oh no, but go to some other place where some one has died: here no one is dead; the maid only sleepeth.

Others answer: No, she does not sleep, but is dead; we are here for the purpose of burying her. You must not take us to be so ignorant as not to know the difference between sleep and death. Hence the Evangelist says, "They laughed Him to scorn, as though He were a fool who does not know what sleep or death is. But the Lord insists on His opinion, and is determined to show that He was right. No one agreed with Him except the father of the maiden. This sufficed for Him; for his sake, that is, for the sake of his faith, He gave the proof that He was right, whilst if the father had not believed, the maiden would not have slept, but would have remained dead. Such a great thing is faith, that trusts in the Lord Jesus for every blessing.

Therefore the Lord steps forward, touches the maid, and shakes her a little with His hand, just as we deal with a sleeping child when we endeavor to awaken it. Thus the father believed, and the Lord wishes to do as the father believed. And soon the maid arose, as if she had enjoyed a good and sound sleep.

These words which the Lord here speaks, "The maid is not dead, but sleepeth," we should diligently study. They are words of comfort, for which, if they could be purchased, we should cheerfully give all that we possess, in order that we might retain, understand, and believe them as they were intended. Whoever could look upon a dead person as though he were lying upon a bed asleep, and so change his vision as to consider death to be a sleep, would have reason to be proud of a peculiar science not understood by anyone else.

But we see and experience in ourselves and others, that the more reason holds sway over a person, the less he believes and the more he is inclined to laugh, as we here see the people mocking the Lord, and asking: Should this man be able to raise the dead unto life? He must be out of His mind, because He considers a dead person to be asleep and capable of being

awakened by the touch of a hand. The wisdom of God is so high that human reason considers it to be altogether foolishness. Suppose a child of yours had died and I would tell you: It is not dead; do you not see that it is merely asleep, and that it can be awakened by a finger? would you not regard me as mocking you in your grief and ask me not to trouble you? The very same thing the people here tell the Lord Jesus.

Therefore learn from this Gospel-lesson, that in the sight of Christ death is nothing more than a sleep; as we here behold Him awakening the dead maid by the touch of His hand as from a mere sleep. Sickness also is no sickness before Him; as is seen in the other example of the woman, who was very sick, but whose sickness had to cease and depart as soon as she came to Christ and touched His garment.

Thus the Lord deals also in other infirmities and distresses. The blind who apply to Him for help receive their sight, the sinners are justified, and the lost are saved. He indeed deals with us wonderfully. His words in our eyes seem not only vain, but even contrary to the facts. Before the eyes of all others the maid was dead; but before my eyes, Christ says, she lives and is asleep. David is in his own eyes and in the eyes of all men a poor shepherd, but before me he is a king. And all of you who believe in me are poor sinners in your own eyes, but before me you are great saints and like the angels of God. For only a word is necessary, and sin, disease, and death must pass away and make room for righteousness, life and health. As I speak, so all things must be.

The Lord God here makes use of a marvelous word when He says of the maiden: "She is not dead, but sleepeth;" which words are a great falsehood in the eyes of the world. If He had merely said, "she sleepeth," the people could have taken it to be the sleep of St. Michael, which lasts till the day of judgment. But He says in plain words: "She is not dead, but sleepeth." In your estimation and in your eyes she is dead, but before me she liveth. And in order that you may behold the truth of my words I awaken her by the touch of a finger, as you are accustomed to awaken your children from sleep.

In short, we are taught here not to look at our need according to human reason with carnal eyes, but with the eyes of faith. These are eyes which, when they behold sin, death, and hell, can nevertheless say with assurance:

I see no death, feel no sin, and am not condemned, but behold in Christ nothing but holiness, life and salvation. Thus, when I am poor I feel no poverty; I feel as though I had plenty of everything; for I have Christ who can give me at all times all I need, though I possess nothing.

Whoever has eyes of this kind might glory in having Christian eyes. He would view things otherwise than the world does in times of famine or of pestilence. In times of famine every one will look at his supply in cellar and granary, and feel according to the amount of that supply. If it be large he will feel happy; if small, he will feel discouraged and despondent. So also in times of pestilence. Whoever then can flee will do so, and seek safety at some other place. But a Christian who has a strong faith in Christ, would argue thus: Though I were attacked, if possible, by a thousand pestilences, I will not fear death, because I have Christ. If it is His will, no pestilence shall harm me any more than a flea, which may bite and sting me a little, but cannot take my life. And certainly if one could had such faith, he would feel secure, fear nothing, and be of good cheer. But because we do not believe and have no spiritual eyes, but look upon everything with carnal eyes, we are afraid and despondent, and are given to foolish thoughts, as though we could flee many miles from the wrath of God.

Now the Lord Jesus testifies that also those live unto God who, according to our view, have died, been buried, and decayed long ago. Therefore the Lord says, Matt. 22: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Therefore Abraham, Isaac and Jacob must live and not be dead, though they have lain in the earth thousands of years, and are long since turned into ashes so that neither hair nor skin is left. But Christ proves plainly that they are living; because unto God all must live, whilst to us all is dead. For the world and human reason can not see anything but death. But the eyes of Christians should see what they do not see, but only hear in the Word, as the father and Christ here look upon the deceased maiden.

What is here said of death may also be said in reference to sin. I am required to know and to confess that I am a sinner, and yet to believe and hope in pure holiness and righteousness. For these are the words of Christ in Baptism: "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved. And in the Sacrament of the Altar:"Eat, this is my body given for you. Drink, this is my blood, which is shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins." Words like

these I am required to believe to be true, and though in myself I see and feel only the contrary, I am not to regard this, but only to look upon the Word, and hear what it says. Thus when you see a Christian die, you behold a dead person; but close such carnal eyes, and open the spiritual eyes which behold the Word, and you will find that such person is not dead, but living before God. For here is the Word of Christ: "He that believeth in me, shall never see death."

Thus we should learn from our Gospel lesson, that all misfortune, no matter how great it is in your eyes, is less than nothing before the Lord. For if death is to be nothing for a Christian, then blindness, deafness, leprosy, pestilence, and other diseases must be still less. Therefore he not alarmed when you discover in yourselves sin, sickness, poverty, or other ills; close your carnal eyes and open your spiritual eyes, and say: I am a Christian and have a Lord who can remove all evil by a word; why should I trouble myself so much. For as easily as He could deliver the maiden from the bodily death into which she had fallen, He can also help us, if we but believe and trust in Him for help.

We should remember also that this maiden experiences help, not through her own faith (for the dead do not believe, as they do not see nor hear), but through the faith of her father, which faith of another is so strong that it becomes the means of her restoration to life. For, as Christ says, "All things are possible to him that believeth." Such a powerful gift is faith! No matter how great a thing is, if you can but believe it and trust in Christ for it, it shall be, and neither death nor the devil shall be able to prevent it. This we learn from both miracles in our text; they are pointed out to us and the excellencies of faith are extolled by our Lord, in order to incite us to look upon the creatures in a far different light as they are in the sight of God from what they are in our sight.

Though to ourselves therefore we appear to be dead, covered with sin, and prostrated by pestilence or other diseases, yet should we believe that God looks upon these things in a different light, and joyfully exclaim: Though I am surrounded by poverty, pestilence, and death, yet as a Christian I know nothing of poverty, pestilence and death; for before my Lord Jesus it is all riches, health, holiness and life. And though I do not see it now, only a word of His is needed, and I shall see it with bodily eyes, that it is true and will surely come to pass.

May God, for the sake of His Son, our Redeemer, through His Holy Spirit grant us such spiritual eyes, that we may look upon all misfortunes differently from what the world does, always be comforted, and finally be saved. Amen.

Twenty-fifth Sunday After Trinity. Matt. 24:15-25.

When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand,) Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

The Gospel lesson for today contains two parts. The first is a warning to those pious Christians who should live to see the destruction of Jerusalem, in order that they might know it beforehand and be enabled to escape from the calamity.

The other is a warning that pertains especially to these last times in which we live, inasmuch as terrible heresies will be introduced, in order that we may be prepared, may hold to the true doctrine, and beware of false prophets. Both of these warnings are necessary and in season, therefore we will study them with all diligence.

Though the first has reference to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, fifteen hundred years ago, we may still derive from it the wholesome and comfortable doctrine that we should learn to love and honor the Word of God, and to live according to it, especially as God in such great wrath has punished the rejection of His Word in His own people. As you heard on the tenth Sunday after Trinity, it was a most lamentable event. "When the Jews at the feast of the Passover had congregated there from the whole country, so that, as Josephus reports, they numbered about three millions of people, the Romans came to take the city.

Such a mass of people can not keep well in a small place for any length of time. They had to suffer from the attacks of three powerful enemies. One enemy was war surrounding the city; in the city a dreadful pestilence raged; a severe famine prevailed so that mothers even killed their own children and prepared and devoured them like other meat. Besides this there was a frightful dissension among the Jews in the city. During the siege and capture of the city, as Josephus states, ten hundred thousand men were killed or died, and ninety-seven thousand were taken captive. These captive Jews were sold, but they were estimated at so low a price that thirty of them could be bought for the eighth part of a guilder. Hence it is no empty word, which the Savior speaks concerning the siege and capture of Jerusalem: "Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

Of this dreadful calamity we should speak to the common people every year, that all might take it to heart and learn what sin is, which is the cause of such calamities, and also learn to avoid it. It is easy to conclude that as God did not spare His own people, who had fallen into this sin, He certainly will not spare us, if we do not avoid it.

It is true, God also is induced to punish the sin of disobedience, murder, adultery, avarice, theft, and other like sins, if man will not repent and avoid them, but such punishment is light compared with this. God does not take

all away, but leaves something. As we see from history, He commonly leaves more than He takes away. But in this case He takes away everything. Hence the sin also, which causes Him to do so, must be greater and more heinous. What is this sin? The Savior says, Luke 19, that all these calamities shall come upon Jerusalem, “because thou knowest not the time of thy visitation.” When God’s Word is not received, but rejected; and when men continue in sin willfully, which was the sin of Jerusalem, then destruction and desolation must follow. God had indeed meant it well with them. He had sent unto them the prophets, John, and at last even His only begotten Son and the apostles. All of them had made it their object to teach the people the way to eternal life, to lead such a life that they could have a good conscience here, and enjoy God’s grace and blessing.

But how do Jerusalem and all the world conduct themselves? They do not want to know or to hear anything of the salvation in Christ. They rather proceed to slaughter the Son of God and the holy apostles, and endeavor to save themselves without Christ and His doctrine. It is impossible that God should laugh and not take vengeance on account of it. Just think of it, if you were rich and would find a poor beggar and conclude to help him, and would send your son to tell him to come, that you would help him out of all his misery and make him a rich man, but he would be an altogether wicked knave, and would slay your son who brought him such a good message — how would you take such a proceeding? and what kind of relation would you sustain toward him in future? This is exactly the sin of the Jews by which they have incited such wrath and have earned such severe punishment. This we should most diligently endeavor to avoid. God cannot bear to see us despise and reject His Word, which He has given us out of paternal love for us. The kingdom of Israel was made to experience what the prophet Hosea saith: “Israel hath cast off the thing that is good; the enemy shall pursue him.” Those who refuse the Word and grace of God, must remain in disgrace and in all manner of heresy. And it is impossible that such a state of things should last any length of time; a total destruction must follow. For this very reason many monarchies and kingdom have been destroyed.

Therefore let us with the greatest of care avoid all contempt for the Word of God. The Jews for the sake of the Gospel killed Christ and the apostles. The Papists today kill many poor Christians and endeavor to suppress the

Word of God by force. We do not, thank God, commit so great a sin; we wish to retain the Word. And yet we observe that in many ways the Word is despised if it is not persecuted. God can not be pleased by your merely going to church and hearing the preaching of the Gospel in such a way, that you hear with your outward ear only, without being made better thereby in the least. For this very purpose God's Word is preached unto you, in order that you may be delivered from sins, be strengthened in your faith in Jesus Christ, and lead a harmless and godly life. But because you go on carelessly in covetousness, licentiousness, anger, envy, pride and other sins, and suffer them to grow on you, as though God had not forbidden them or you were doing God service, God can certainly not regard these sins as anything else than contempt, and will therefore, in due time, inflict severer punishment than you may expect.

Hence we should not lose sight of the picture of God's wrath, but adhere to His Word with all our heart, attentively hear it and be bettered by it. For this purpose it is preached. And those who do not change for the better, either despising or persecuting the Word, may learn here what calamity will come upon them. For if God did not excuse His own people when they despised and persecuted His Word, you certainly should not expect that He will excuse you.

For we do not behold merely the kingdom of Israel and Judea and afterwards the holy city of Jerusalem, lie before us in ashes because of these sins, but also Asia, Syria, Egypt, Greece, Macedonia and other countries, as far as Austria. God's Word had dwelt among them richly, but now the Turks have taken possession, who have devastated everything. People lost not only their life and estate, but also their souls, because they were deprived everywhere of the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. This calamity they brought about by carelessly losing sight of God's Word and doctrine. Let this be a warning for us. The time may not be far distant, when the Papists also, who despise and persecute the Word and tenaciously cling to their idolatry, shall meet a similar fate. Hence it is high time to amend and to return. For when the wrath of God is once explained on account of these sins, it is not so easily quenched, as we see from the example of the Jews.

Not merely the terrible wrath, however, should cause us to abstain from these sins, but we should be induced by the friendly warning to adhere to the Word and diligently to hear it and be benefited by it. Both are here

presented. The Jews who reject the Word are fearfully punished, whilst those who accept Christ and believe in Him, enjoy the Lord Jesus and their faith, being warned and escaping the calamities. And more than this: For the sake of these Christians, Daniel had to point out the signs, more than five hundred years before, in order that they might take warning in time to escape before it is too late.

Thus far, things went on rather unequally. The blind and hardened Jews had acted arbitrarily in opposition to the Word, and yet they had maintained their supremacy in conducting the government. The poor Christians, on the other hand, had to submit always, being without protection of life and limb. But this lasted only for a while. When the wrath of God showed itself, the pious were rescued, but the wicked had to suffer and were destroyed. Inasmuch as the wicked mass of the people did not want to accept Christ as the teacher promised them in Deuteronomy 18, who was to teach them the way to eternal life and salvation, they did not believe Him either when He preached about the wrath to come. Believing Christians, however, entrusted themselves for their soul's salvation unto Christ. Therefore they were protected also bodily from the wrath. When the time came that wantonness prevailed in general, and the Romans put their idols and flags in places where the mercy-seat and the sanctuary of the Jews stood, then the pious Christians knew that it was time to escape and to flee to distant lands. Thus Christ will reward His Christians who accept His Word in faith and use it for their improvement.

This, I say, should induce us to adhere to the Word more faithfully and to hear it with greater devotion. On account of our sins and wickedness we live in perilous times. The Turks are upon us as our enemies; and there is no way of escape, unless we amend and begin a new life. And we have no security against sharing the same fate as the inhabitants of Hungary, whose women and children were led captives into Turkey.

There are sad prospects of pestilence, famine, and divisions before us also in Germany. Such scourges are intended for the wicked despisers and persecutors of the Word, and they will also have to feel them. But those who love and esteem the Word of God, hear it with devotion, are benefited by it, oppose the sins of the old Adam day by day, and do not follow the example of the wicked world, but restrain themselves and ask: Why should I for the sake of a piece of money refuse obedience to God and His Word?

Should I not rather, for God's sake, give up ten pieces than injure my soul and offend God with one piece wrongly obtained? — such people, I say, who adhere to the Word, confide their hearts and trust in the mercy of God through Christ Jesus, carefully guard against sin and continue in the exercise of true piety, shall also enjoy the fruit of such piety; whilst others shall suffer on account of their sins.

Therefore we see that Daniel and his companions, who were pious and did not defile themselves willfully by the sins of the Gentiles, though they were in captivity also, did not suffer so severe a punishment as the impious Jews. Yea, more than this: God exalted them in the midst of their enemies to the position of great lords, and enabled them to accomplish much good among the Gentiles. If you remain pious and God-fearing, God also will remember you, and will permit you to enjoy the fruits of piety, though it be in Turkey. This we should remember, and therefore be pious and obedient to the Word of God.

The Savior here adds a few Words which we should also well notice. "Pray ye," He says, "that your flight be not in winter, neither on the Sabbath day." In winter it is difficult to flee on account of snow and storm. As regards the Sabbath day, the Jews had a law which forbade them on that day to go further than a Sabbath day's journey, or about a mile. Christ urges us to pray. He points to the importance not only of readily and diligently hearing God's Word, but also of prayer. Such prayer will occasion and induce God to remember us and to add His blessing and give success to our undertakings.

In danger and distress, such as we experience in perilous times like ours, we should not suffer a day to pass by without committing ourselves in prayer to the care and protection of almighty God, asking Him to be with us and to preserve us in every trouble. So Christ also teaches us in the Lord's Prayer to ask for daily bread. For it is not enough to have food and drink in order to sustain bodily life; we also need peace, good weather, and the like. This petition includes every bodily need. We pray that God would protect us against the Turks and the pestilence, and give us a good year and fruitful harvest. And because Christ commands us thus to pray, we have no reason to doubt that God will graciously hear us and give us everything necessary for body and soul, if we pray for it earnestly.

This is the first part of our text, that we should diligently hear the Word of God, be benefited by it, and never despise and persecute it, because God severely punishes despisers and persecutors, but graciously warns, protects and delivers those who accept His Word and live righteously.

The second part, as I have said, also contains a warning with reference to these our latter days. This warning begins where our Lord says: "Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." These are dreadful words, which we should carefully take to heart and the more diligently cling to the Word. Our danger is not the same which encompassed Jerusalem, such as war and bloodshed, but it is greater and more serious, such as heresy, false doctrine and false worship, by which we are injured not only in body and life, but also as it regards the salvation of our souls; as the Lord says: "No man would be saved except those days should be shortened."

Whether we are to expect such blindness in the future before the day of judgment comes, we do not properly know. But when we look back we observe such great blindness and such dreadful and, as St. Paul calls them, "strong delusions," on account of which, if God had not in mercy interfered with the light of His Word, no one could have been saved, except the little innocent children who died after being baptized and before they arrived at the age of reason. For what did we have in popery concerning Christ, forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and peace of conscience, to which we could have taken refuge? On the other hand, what strong delusions and blasphemous lies were promulgated among the people, under the garb of truth, upon which they were to base their hope of salvation. Therefore I judge that this prophecy of our Lord Jesus about future delusions is in the main fulfilled. And though delusions and darkness will be also in the future, yet they can not well be greater than they have already been in popery, as we have seen and as their own books will show.

Besides, we have no reason to doubt the words. He calls things by the right name and says what kind of delusion it is. "For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

It is unnecessary here to make a difference between false Christs and false prophets. Yet, because the prophecy corresponds exactly to history, we

may without danger make a distinction and apply the name of false Christs to the Turks and their creed, and the name of false prophets to the pope and his doctrine. For these two powers the pope and the Turk are no doubt the very Antichrist, against whom Daniel, Christ, Paul, John and other apostles have warned us.

The substance of the Turkish creed is that it rejects the true Christ, the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary, and puts Mohammed in His place. The Turks believe Christ to have been a prophet who was of some renown in His day, but that He was not God. Hence whatever Christians expect of Christ, must be expected of Mohammed; he will save men and is the favorite prophet of God, above Moses, Abraham, Christ and all others. These blasphemous doctrines and horrible lies have deceived and carried off the greater portion of the world. We see that all Egypt, Syria, Asia, Greece, Macedonia, and many other countries have this faith and live and die in it, rejecting Christ and trusting the evil Mohammed.

This is not done by the pope; he confesses Christ, the Son of God the Father and the Son of Mary, to be the eternal God, and does not make another Christ. But he falsifies the doctrine of Christ; for all that we expect from Christ and hope to derive from His merit, he teaches us to expect and to hope from the merits, intercession, and work of the saints; for which reason there were no bounds or end to the worship of the Papists. They held the doctrine concerning which the Lord has said: "Lo, here is Christ, or there; behold He is in the desert, He is in the secret chambers." Why did monks and nuns enter the cloister? Why has one become a priest and another a hermit? Why did men make pilgrimages? Why were masses read, heard, or instituted? Certainly for no other reason than to make people believe, that in this way Christ, that is God's grace, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life and salvation, may be found.

For this reason Christ warns most against the Antichrist who does not institute another Christ nor deny Him, like the Turks, but who at the same time, by false doctrine, leads away from the true Christ to the creature and his own work, saying: "Believe it not," that is, do not suffer yourselves to be deceived, but adhere to me and cleave to my doctrine and my work and merit alone, and nothing shall harm you.

And what has been done? There has been no lack of faithful warning by our Lord Jesus, as we have heard. "Behold," He says, "I have told you before." All the fault was with us, because we did not heed those warnings, but went on blindly and believed what we were told, notwithstanding that the Lord had forbidden it, saying: Believe it not, though ye see signs and wonders. For true signs and wonders agree with the Word of Christ and do not divert from it.

The devil also shows signs and wonders, as Christ here declares and warns. And St. Paul calls them "lying wonders," because they support lies and lead people away from the Word of truth. The Turks today glory in many wonders which Mohammed is said to have performed and to be still performing. I believe that in part they are wonders; but they are not performed by God, but by the devil, that he may thereby support his lies.

Thus the church of the pope is full of wonderful signs; one saint is said to have performed this, and another to have performed that sign. And though many falsehoods have been put in circulation, we cannot deny, that some wonders have really taken place. For Christ Himself tells us that those false Christs and false prophets shall show great signs and wonders for the purpose of deceiving the people and of inducing them to hold these lies to be truth. Such signs are not performed by God, but by the devil; and him we should not believe.

From this you may perceive the foundation of the true doctrine, from which you should not deviate in the least. Note well that the true doctrine points you to Christ and presents Him, in order that you may be truly comforted against sin and death. This is done by teaching that we should believe Christ to be true, eternal and almighty God, one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, who has come to us on earth, conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. He finally died on the cross, not for His own sins, but for our sins; in order that God might be reconciled and our debt might be canceled, and that we might arise from the dead and come to the enjoyment of everlasting life. In our behalf, Christ has conquered sin and death, so that these no more can harm us; now Christ sitteth at the right hand of God, protecting us against the devil, bestowing upon us the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and answering all our prayer, offered in His name for all we need for body and soul. This is the true doctrine concerning Christ and

agrees throughout with the Word, which alone will enable us to resist Antichrist and his lies.

When these doctrines are properly lodged within the heart, they will, first of all, induce people to glory in the goodness and grace of God, to love Him with all their heart, and also to live to the honor of this merciful God. They will begin, in true earnest to do all that they know to be pleasing to God; and to avoid all that they know to have been forbidden by Him. They are then pious and holy Christians, because they enjoy forgiveness of sins by faith and live in the fear of God and in obedience to Him. Therefore Christ so earnestly admonishes us to adhere to these doctrines and not listen to any thing contrary. He promises too, on His part, that He will not suffer Himself to be confined to any other place, but that He will be with us in His Word and grace, always and everywhere. And though it sounds terrible, that great heresy, darkness and seduction shall come upon the world, yet we are comforted when He says: “Wherever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together;” that is, my Christian Church shall remain with me. And though the devil, the Turk, and the pope, be ever so powerful, they shall not harm my Christians who adhere to my Word.

May our merciful God in heaven, through the Holy Ghost, for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, our dear Lord, grant this to all of us. Amen.

The End.

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